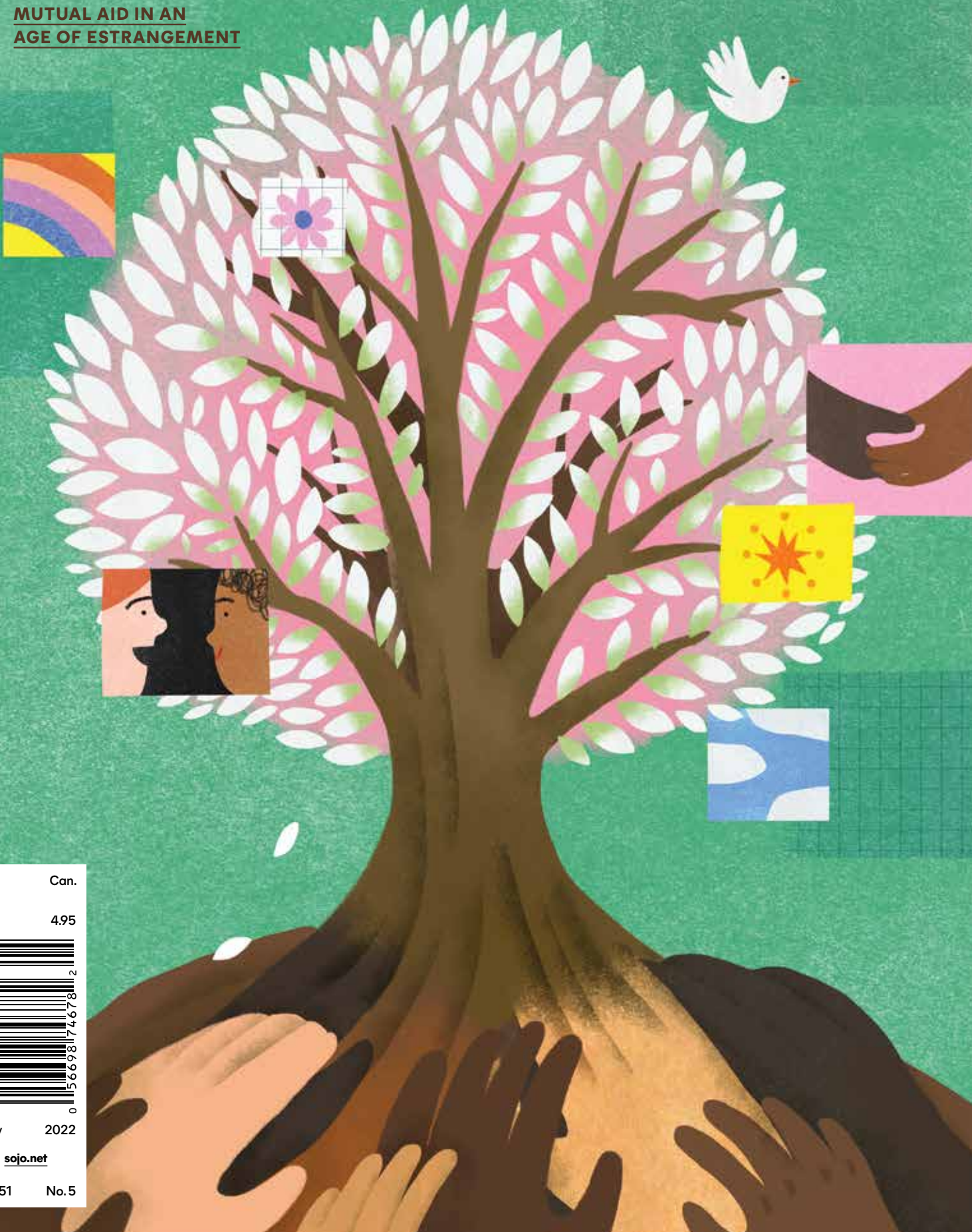


WE BELONG TO ONE ANOTHER

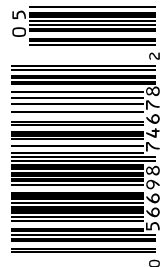
MUTUAL AID IN AN
AGE OF ESTRANGEMENT

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May 2022

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Vol. 51 No. 5

A Way to Engage Kids in Conversations on the Beauty of Diversity

When Josey wonders why people are so different, Dad helps her understand that our differences aren't a mistake. In fact, we have many differences because God is creative!

Children and the adults who read with them are invited to join Josey as she learns of God's wonderfully diverse design. Also included is a note from the author to encourage further conversation about the content.



ESAU MCCAULLEY is assistant professor of New Testament at Wheaton College, the bestselling author of *Reading While Black*, and a contributing opinion writer for the *New York Times*. When he's not writing or teaching, you can often find him at a beauty parlor with his daughter.



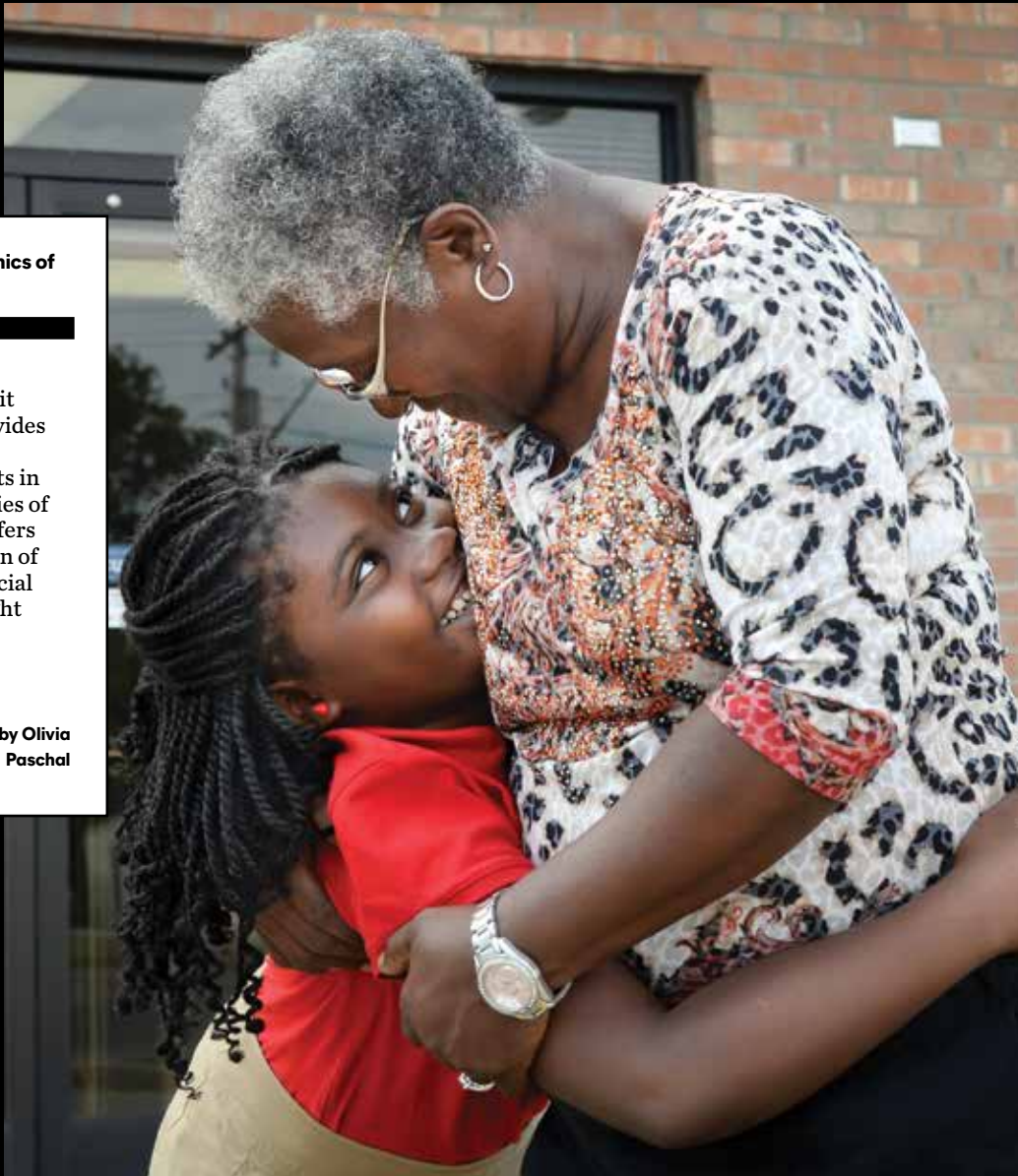
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"IMPORTING DEPOSITS BACK INTO THE DELTA IS A FORM OF REPARATIONS."

The Economics of Freedom

Hope Credit Union provides more than investments in communities of need—it offers a new vision of what financial justice might look like.

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Paschal



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'Prayers on Plates' A multifaith food rescue community fills the food gap in Detroit.

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We Belong to One Another From the book of Acts to prison abolitionists, mutual aid is a way to create networks of communal care.

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Villegas

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Correction: In our April 2022 issue, the name of Princeton Seminary president M. Craig Barnes was misspelled as Craig M. Barnes. We apologize for the error.

What can you do with an MA in Social Justice?

Ask Alexander Clemetson

Director of Strategic Development, SEA Change
Founder and Executive Director, Together We Compost

With his 2021 MA in Social Justice from MTSO, Alexander has founded a composting service and overseen the creation of a Fresh Market, offering fresh, free, healthy produce as a resource in partnership with Columbus' Linden community. Now he's guiding SEA Change through strategic implementation of long-term goals and projects helping social entrepreneurs solidify their impact.



"The MA in Social Justice features a lot of hands-on engagement – not just talking through justice but applying your passion in practical ways that make a real difference. It has equipped me to combat injustice, and it's connected me with others who are doing the work."



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**For more information, please contact Victoria Elie
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January 19–30, 2023

From the Editor

In our cover article, Mennonite pastor Isaac Villegas looks at communities of people taking care of one another in examples of “mutual aid.” As Villegas explains, Anabaptists—the ethnic and spiritual forebears of several Christian denominations, including Mennonites—have a long history of such mutual care, tracing back not only to the Radical Reformation of the 16th century but to the earliest Christian communities, as portrayed in the New Testament book of Acts.

All three feature articles in this issue deal with aspects of such communities of care and concern. Olivia Paschal tells the story of a credit union born in the Deep South with a vision of building economic justice and enabling a path toward financial freedom for many people in the throes of generational poverty. And Olivia Diaz looks at how people of faith are helping to fill the gap for those lacking access to adequate food in Detroit. All of these are examples of people following one of Jesus’ central commands—Love one another as I have loved you—and help us see concrete ways we can do likewise.

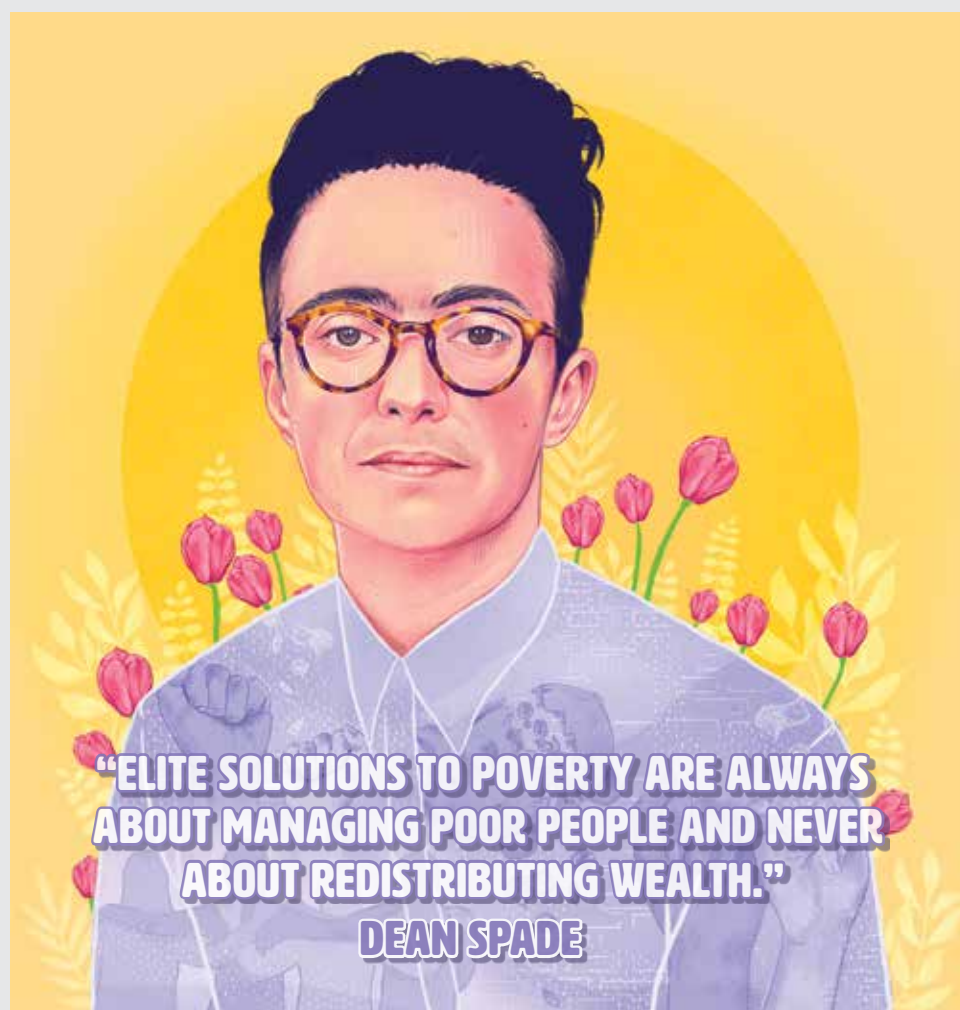
RESPONSE

Part of the Problem

“Like many Americans, I am concerned about the divisiveness of our nation as well as admitting that I am part of the problem,” Linda Grace Solis wrote in response to Adam Russell Taylor’s “A Step Away from Extremism” (March 2022).

“When I recall that Jesus told us to love one another, my brain instantly goes to the racists, the bigots, white supremacy, etc., because THEY are the ones who need to love more! Which of course just shows me that I’m no better than they because I struggle mightily with loving THEM.” Emmy Kegler’s commentary, “Will Religion Reporting Come Out?” (March 2022) drew attention to the positive, engaged side of the LGBTQ+ community’s faith journey. Alisha Attella-Sevier  noted how important it is to tell these stories: “It’s infrequent that we see ourselves represented this way, and that can be discouraging and even frightening when someone feels called to community.”

Write us: response@sojo.net



"IT IS NOT
GOD'S WILL
FOR SOME
TO HAVE
EVERYTHING
AND OTHERS
TO HAVE
NOTHING."

Óscar Romero
Salvadoran Catholic archbishop

CONTRIBUTING



Olivia Paschal

"Everywhere that you think is hopeless, there is actually work being done," says freelance journalist and doctoral student in history Olivia Paschal (p. 20). Influenced by Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement, Paschal's faith informs the work she does and what she writes about. "There are always people doing the work of justice," she says. "Being a journalist lets you talk to those people." When she's not researching land, labor, and history, Paschal finds joy in NBC sitcoms, long drives, and playing squash.



Melanie Lambrick

Freelance artist and "H'rumps" illustrator Melanie Lambrick (p. 50) strives to create a visual "language that everyone understands," emulating the "refreshing and nostalgic" tone of "a Saturday cartoon" while bringing complex ideas to life. Lambrick lives in the woods on an island in British Columbia where she works on her art and tends to her garden and 15-year-old cat, Fern. "If I had known as a kid that [this] was a job you could actually have," Lambrick laughs, "I wouldn't have believed it."

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1787

Year the Free African Society was founded—one of the first Black mutual aid organizations in the U.S.

20,000

Children who received meals in 1969 and 1970 through the Black Panther Party's Free Breakfast for School Children program

Tens of thousands

Mutual aid networks and projects started amid the COVID-19 pandemic, according to organizer Mariame Kaba

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The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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1

MOBILIZING HOPE

BY ADAM RUSSELL TAYLOR

PUTTING WORKERS OVER GREED

On May 1, tens of millions of people across the globe celebrate International Workers' Day, often called May Day or International Labor Day. Countries around the world have made May Day a major holiday, but its origin as a day to fight for and honor the rights of workers has strong roots in the United States and the struggle for the eight-hour workday. During the Great Depression, Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin chose May Day 1933 to launch the first issue of *The Catholic Worker*, a newspaper dedicated to the proposition that it is "possible to be radical and not atheist"—an idea that has also been central to Sojourners these past 50 years. In fact, a radical commitment to labor rights and economic justice is *because* of our faith, not in spite of it.

**A RADICAL
COMMITMENT TO
LABOR RIGHTS IS
BECAUSE OF OUR
FAITH, NOT IN
SPITE OF IT.**

“CHRIST BOLDLY CONFRONTED UNJUST AND EXPLOITATIVE SYSTEMS.”

The dedication and sacrifice of labor activists has led to hard-won rights—including the eight-hour workday, the weekend, safe working conditions, an end to most child labor, and more—rights far too many of us can take for granted. And yet standing up for the dignity and rights of workers remains incredibly important because these rights are not enjoyed by everyone equally and have been relentlessly eroded over the past four decades. The struggle for labor rights has shifted amid an evolution in the nature of work, with many workers exercising greater agency in the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving behind jobs that are often underpaid, unsafe, or underappreciated.

In 2021, just 11.6 percent of U.S. workers were represented by a union, roughly half of the 1983 percentage. At the same time, economic inequality is as bad as it's ever been—since the start of the pandemic, U.S. billionaires' wealth has surged by more than 70 percent, an increase of an unfathomable \$2.1 trillion. Amazon defeated the efforts of overwhelmingly Black warehouse employees in Bessemer, Ala., to

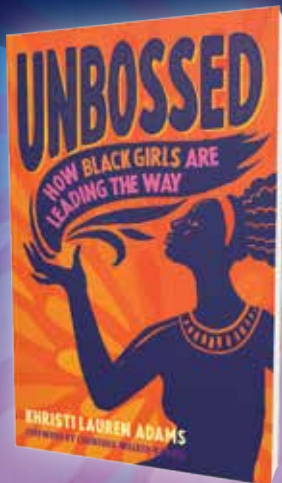
form the first-ever union of the company's workers. Soon thereafter Jeff Bezos self-funded a trip for himself into orbit. Meanwhile, the Senate failed to raise the federal minimum wage to a living wage or to advance the Protecting the Right to Organize Act, which would strengthen labor law and eliminate some of the barriers to unionization, and Congress has failed to guarantee paid family leave and universal access to childcare, which remain essential ways to support parents in the workforce.

Christ boldly confronted unjust and exploitative systems, evidenced by his prophetic act of overturning the tables of the money changers because they were defiling the temple by exploiting the poor. As his followers, we must also elevate people over greed. We must remember the ways in which the earliest disciples—most of them urban and rural workers themselves—lived in community and shared their possessions with each other (Acts 4:32-35). In recent years, Pope Francis has been outspoken about the dignity of workers, decrying modern slavery and insisting that workers' dignity must be respected with just pay and conditions that respect human dignity. Let's honor working people this May Day and beyond by advocating for policies that affirm the dignity of work and put workers over greed. ✦



Adam Russell Taylor is president of Sojourners.

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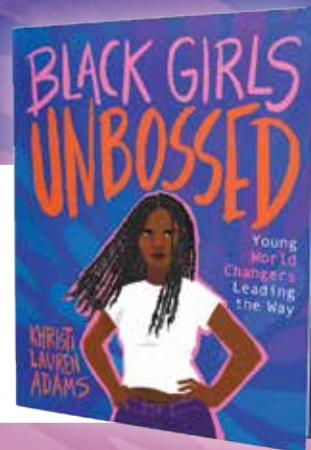
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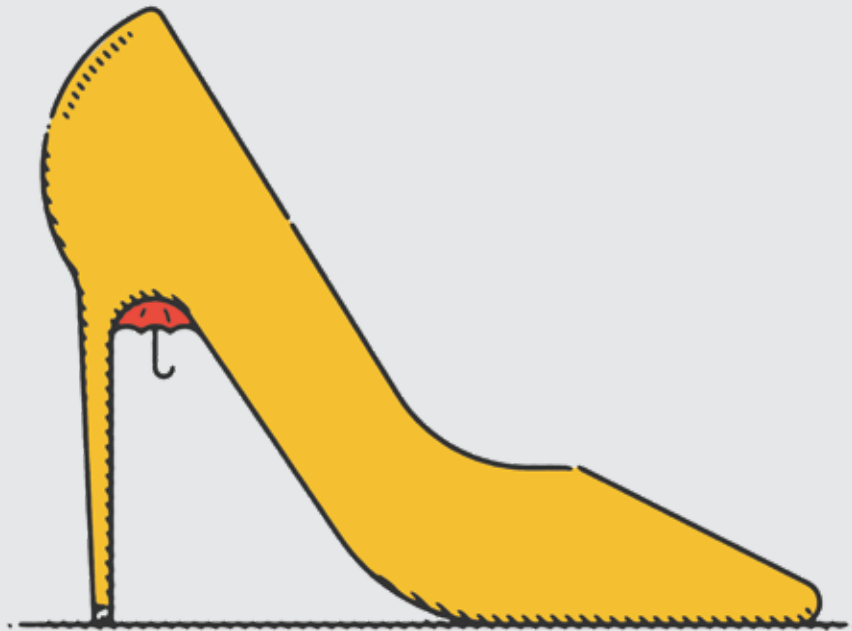
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SHOULD PROSTITUTION BE DECRIMINALIZED?

The most important question is, "How would I treat Jesus?"



2

A woman I know was arrested on her birthday for the crime of solicitation for prostitution—agreeing to a sex act for money. She spent 18 days in jail, enough time for a brutal detox from the synthetic opioid fentanyl.

Tara (name changed to protect her identity) is not an empowered sex worker, at least not in the way that sex worker rights activists would like to describe her in their vehemence against her arrest. Nor does Tara identify as a sex trafficking “victim” or “survivor.” She would tell you that she chose the street life and all that comes with it.

Though I am constantly learning from my friends in the sex trade, here is what I understand after spending 10 years with this population:

1. *There is no one-size-fits-all term claimed by those in the sex trade.* Victim. Survivor. Whore. Prostitute. Sex Worker. Streetwalker. A sex worker can be female, male, nonbinary,

or transgender. Words matter, of course. But let's not be so married to our preferred label that we fail to be curious about someone's story.

2. *Local governments should decriminalize crimes of poverty, including sex work.* About one million people in this country are incarcerated for offenses indirectly related to their poverty (for example, low-level drug offenses, property crimes, homelessness, and prostitution). About half a million are imprisoned because they cannot pay for their own release. Our political economy is built on extracting from the poor what little wealth they have. That's no different than what happens in the sex trade. Decriminalization refers to the removal of all criminal and administrative prohibitions and penalties on sex work. Even where sex work is decriminalized, the prostitution of minors and human trafficking can and should remain criminal acts.

3. *Sex workers have autonomy and can make choices—but those choices are severely limited by their material conditions.* The complexity here is that people are agents who make the best choices about their lives that they can, and many marginalized people simply don't have as many choices as the more privileged. So much debate exists around the role of choice in the sex trade—sex worker rights' activists wanting to emphasize agency and choice, and radical feminist communities wanting to emphasize the lack of choices and coercion into the sex trade. I advocate a nuanced view that honors and respects individual choice while working to change the material conditions that often keep those choices limited. Any person deprived of secure housing, sufficient income, and robust communal solidarity may turn to sex work as a means of survival. As one former sex worker stated, "Fight the industry, support the worker."

4. *Buyers of sex also reveal something of the image of God.* This is something I've learned mostly from my friends who are in or who have exited the sex trade. Many who want to "fight human trafficking" do so by focusing on "ending demand" and demonizing those who buy sex. This is not what sex workers are asking us to do. What I have heard instead is a call for greater compassion for those who buy sex. The sex

OUR POLITICAL ECONOMY IS BUILT ON EXTRACTING FROM THE POOR WHAT LITTLE WEALTH THEY HAVE.

workers I have spoken to seem more adept at seeing their shared humanity with the men who buy sex—men who may not be living with the same limited choices but are, somehow, made of the same stuff. The buyers of sex are fully human. Restorative justice demands that they too be brought into the fold of equitable community.

Feminist liberation theologian Thia Cooper writes: "Jesus Christ is in the 'other' with whom I deal, whether I am a buyer, seller or manager of sex. Jesus is a poor prostitute trying to put food on the table for her children. ... The question is often asked 'what would Jesus do?' I would argue a more important question is 'how would I treat Jesus?'"

I imagine a world where those involved in the sex trade not only know where to go to get help, but they know of their tangible inclusion in the beloved community. They have many needs, and they are desperately needed. This is what solidarity looks like.

I run Sanctuary Night drop-in center in Columbus, Ohio, where we provide a safe space for vulnerable women. Not long ago, two women showed up just as we were about to close. One was desperately hungry—and we were out of food for the night. The people around started searching for food. The second woman looked at her friend and said, "When have you asked for food, and I have not fed you?" (See Luke 11:9-13.)

Standing there on Sullivant Avenue in Columbus, I heard the voice of Jesus from the mouth of a sex worker: "Ask, and it shall be given to you." Mutual need; mutual belovedness. ❖

Hannah Estabrook, executive director of Sanctuary Night in Columbus, Ohio, also formerly worked in a specialized county court that serves victims of prostitution and human trafficking.



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COMMENTARY

BY JUNG EUN SOPHIA PARK



ABSENCE AND PRESENCE

**The Easter mystery enables us to flow
and move like water.**

After the solemn journey of Lent, through which we embrace the mystery of the death of Jesus Christ, we enter the mystery of Easter, a new life. And as we celebrate Easter, we cannot remain in the feelings of fear and anxiety, which merely lead us into inaction. All the gospels' Easter narratives include the empty tomb. Our standing in front of the empty tomb symbolizes our standing at the threshold to new life. For example, in John's gospel we imaginatively encounter Mary Magdalene, who runs to the grave with spices to prepare for Jesus' funeral while continuing to be sad. However, at the dawn of Easter she hears Jesus say, "Do not hold onto me."

At the very familiar space of death, representing deep feelings of despair, Jesus' voice introduces a cut or prohibition and indicates that the old way cannot continue to operate beyond this point. Upon hearing this, Mary must face the empty tomb, which signifies a lack or a hole. The starting point, then, from which to walk into the paschal mystery, can be the acknowledgment that the lack of full wisdom, perfection, and completeness is the reality of the self and the world. Often, we experience resistance to moving or walking onto a new or unknown path, while still fully knowing a new life is waiting. The life of resurrection commands us to step into the resurrected body of Jesus Christ. In this pandemic-ridden

time, what does it mean to walk into the new life of the Risen Christ?

First, the life of the paschal mystery begins with an embrace of a lack or a hole in our lives, which may be our sorrow or hopelessness in the pursuit of sincere faith. The resurrected body finds expression in that Jesus' physical body disappears, and he then stands beyond our horizon of comprehension; we walk onto the unknown path. The empty tomb—this hole—always lures us to move beyond our framework of understanding and action. The new hope running through the paschal mystery invites us to embrace our wounds and guilt derived from the failure to bring justice and peace in this world.

Second, the resurrected body of Jesus becomes the Path or the Way by which his life force moves forward. Like wind or water, Jesus' resurrected body continuously moves and touches the world and all humankind. In our paschal faith, we become a part of the resurrected body of Christ, this life force that flows and moves constantly.

The 13th-century German mystic Mechthild of Magdeburg saw grace as light flowing from the Godhead. Her visions encourage us to live the Easter mystery, the life force that the resurrected body endows us with to flow and move. Here, our body and Christ's resurrected body are mutually engaged through the flowing life force. Love, as a drive, cannot stay; it is constantly moving.

Similarly, the *Tao Te Ching* (a central text of both philosophical and religious Taoism foundational in many Asian cultures) also manifests a moving truth or life force, called the Tao ("the Way"). Chapter 8 recalls: "The highest form of goodness is like water. / Water knows how to benefit all things without striving with them. / It stays in places loathed by all people. / Therefore, it comes near the Tao."

As a part of the resurrected body of Christ in the Tao, we too are supposed to flow like water, to serve the world peacefully, without any violence or hatred. In pursuing justice in the world, we are to be willing to go to any spaces that cause discomfort and unfamiliarity, because then we are close to the Risen Christ. ✕

Jung Eun Sophia Park, SNJM, author of *An Asian Woman's Religious Journey with Thomas Merton*, is associate professor of religious studies and philosophy at Holy Names University in California.

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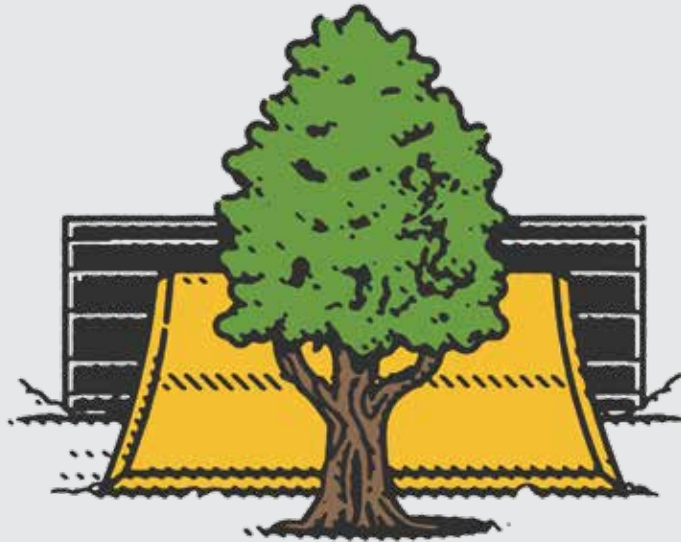
REFUSING TO BE ENEMIES

Tent of Nations, a 100-acre farm southwest of Bethlehem in the West Bank, Palestine, has been in the Nassar family since their grandfather bought it more than a century ago. The family's attempts to hold onto their land and prevent settlers from taking it over has been an ongoing battle—not only within the realm of the legal system. The Nassar family has had to physically defend their land, nonviolently, from repeated encroachments and attacks, which have included the burning and uprooting of their olive trees, the bulldozing of their plants, harassment and intimidation, and constant attempts to destroy the few physical structures they set up. The family's persistence in remaining on the land has been one of the most remarkable examples of Palestinian *sumud* (or steadfastness) I have seen.

The story of their resistance is not just a political story of one Palestinian family's assertion of its ancestral rights. The Nassar family members are devout Lutherans, deeply committed Christians who attempt to live out their faith in practice. They have used their property as a tangible example of their Christ-centered commitment to peace, reconciliation, and nonviolence.

The Nassars openly declare that they “refuse to be enemies,” turning their property into a “Tent of Nations” and offering hospitality and warm welcome to one and all. While insisting on their rights and absolutely refusing to leave, they do not resort to violence but stand firm with peaceful, determined nonviolent resistance.

In late January, a group of masked people from a nearby village assaulted Daoud and Daher Nassar, beating them with “iron bars, large sticks, and razors,” according to the family, and landing them in the hospital with severe injuries. The



perpetrators, whose identity must be known to both the Israeli military and the Palestinian Authority, have previously made spurious claims to the land and have attacked the Nassars before. The land is in an area under Israeli control, and the Israeli military has shown little interest in pursuing the culprits or providing protection to the family. Furthermore, the Palestinian Authority has shown little interest in protecting or defending the Nassars with anything like the zeal with which they cooperate to protect any Israeli settler who strays into a Palestinian town or village. The “security coordination” between the Palestinian Authority and Israel Defense Forces does not extend to the protection of Palestinians.

The steadfast nonviolence of the Nassar family, even amid threats against their peace efforts and violent attacks against their selves, offers a sign of hope for those still seeking progress toward a just, peaceful future in the Middle East in the face of so much evidence that such progress is impossible. In their faithful persistence, the Nassar family, and many others like them, refuse to concede that the cycle of oppressive occupation and retributive violence will have the last word. ❖

**THE “SECURITY
COORDINATION”
BETWEEN THE
PALESTINIAN
AUTHORITY AND
ISRAEL DEFENSE
FORCES DOES NOT
EXTEND TO THE
PROTECTION OF
PALESTINIANS.**

Jonathan Kuttat, co-founder of Nonviolence International, is executive director of Friends of Sabeel North America, from which this is adapted.

‘WAR IS A GREAT EVIL’



The Russian bear has once again swatted the Ukrainian nightingale.

In response to Russian President Vladimir Putin's bloody adventurism in Ukraine, thousands of Russians defied harsh anti-protest laws to hold anti-war demonstrations. Even before rockets exploded over Kyiv, his pro-Kremlin proxies took over eastern Donbas in 2014, killing 13,000 people, a quarter of them civilians, and displacing more than 850,000. Human rights abuses in the breakaway regions skyrocketed. There is no free and independent media. Journalists are targeted. Religious persecution against Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, and other religious minorities is constant and harsh. Both Ukrainian and pro-Russia armed groups detained hundreds of civilians charged with “espionage” and held them in undisclosed locations, often subjecting them to torture. The slow unraveling of the fragile ceasefire brokered in 2020, in addition to COVID-19 restrictions, left Ukrainians gasping and afraid.

Churches too are caught in the literal crossfire as well as the crossfire of contested histories. As the hot war started, Valery Antonyuk, head of the All-Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches, called on all congregations to prepare to open their churches to the displaced. “Our churches must become centers of service to our people in times of adversity,” he said, emphasizing that his pastors were not leaving.

Orthodox churches in the region are especially vulnerable to partisan politics. In Ukraine, there are competing claims between the two Orthodox patriarchates. The older and larger is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate. The Russian Orthodox Church has long been aligned with the Russian state and too rarely its conscience. However, the leader of the Ukrainian branch bravely appealed to Russia's leadership, saying “Such a war is not justified either by God or by people.” The newer and more fragile is the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which marked its independence from Moscow in 2018, swiftly followed by

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Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew welcoming the Orthodox Church of Ukraine into the worldwide communion of Orthodox churches. The new leader, 43-year-old Metropolitan Epifaniy, released a prayer at the outbreak of the Russian attack saying, “War is a great evil that goes against God's intention of creation.”

Wars are fought on blood and treasure. Putin can only fund his war because 40 percent of his economy is floated by fossil fuel exports. He also controls the choke-point of natural gas to western Europe. Peace may require a rapid and massive scale-up of renewable energy—especially in the United States and Europe, as Germany is implementing. Such action, said climate leader Bill McKibben, “dramatically reduces the power of autocrats, dictators, and thugs.” With guidance from Patriarch Bartholomew, “the Green Patriarch,” who strongly condemned the Russian attack, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine could emerge as an advocate for God's creation and renewable energy as a sign of Ukrainian resilience, independence, and national pride. But first, the Putin bear must be pushed out of arm's reach—both by undermining his support at home and brave civil defense by Ukrainians.

St. Basil of Caesarea wrote, “Nothing is so characteristically Christian as being a peacemaker.” Around the world we pray to hear the nightingale sing again. ♦

Rose Marie Berger, author of *Bending the Arch: Poems*, is a senior editor of *Sojourners* magazine.



THE QUESTION THAT CHANGED MY FAITH

Seventy-four years ago, scholar, mystic, and pastor Howard Thurman gave a lecture series at Samuel Huston College (now Huston-Tillotson University) in Austin, Texas. The series would become the basis for his seminal book *Jesus and the Disinherited*. One of Thurman's students, Martin Luther King Jr., reportedly traveled with a copy of Thurman's book. Through his writings and teachings, Thurman was a mentor and chaplain for many activists during the civil rights movement.

Jesus and the Disinherited continues to inspire many contemplatives and activists and has profoundly shaped my own approach to ministry. The main inspiration comes through a question Thurman posed to American Christianity: "What, then, is the word of the religion of Jesus to those who stand with their backs against the wall?" Thurman's question confronted the fact that American Christianity was, as historian Vincent Harding put it, a "strange mutation" away from the teachings and ethics of Jesus. Jesus, who was raised in the poor village of Nazareth out of the mainstream of Roman culture. Jesus, who was Galilean, which meant that even among the Jews, Jesus and his people were considered outcasts. Jesus, who spent many of his days moving from town to town touching lepers, transgressing boundaries, befriending Samaritans, and turning over the tables on corrupt economic practices in the temple. In light of Jesus' ministry, Thurman was challenging an American Christianity that was rampantly materialistic and segregationist, looming above the daily experiences of the disinherited. Thurman's writings demonstrated how a path-altering question

can help inoculate our faith from harmful (American) mutations and point us back to the integrity of Jesus' Way.

For my East Harlem church, this has meant slowly moving beyond just holding space for middle-class comfort while challenging our preaching to be more rooted in the perspective of women and others in the Bible who have been overlooked. Our church is also participating in an interfaith Bible study with Central Synagogue and Exodus Transitional Community (ETC). ETC is an organization working with people impacted by the criminal justice system. Recently, participants in the Bible study became stuck on the question: "How do we discern hope through the looming shadows of our times?" Many in the group provided good responses, but the most profound came from Gary Brown, a director at ETC. Gary spoke about his arrest during the Clinton administration, which adopted punitive measures in the so-called war on drugs. He was sentenced to life without parole and said, "I reached my lowest moment" when viewing the sentencing document and seeing his release date, which read: "Deceased." From this hopeless place, Gary kept faith. He used his time at the Florence Correctional Facility in Colorado to mentor young people; he didn't want them to repeat his same mistakes. He also led anger management classes, rescripting his story even while in the valley of the shadow of death. After serving 26 years, against all odds, Gary was granted clemency. After his release, Gary would find ETC and work his way into management, living a powerful story of liberation and resilience.

At our Bible study that day, Gary's testimony breathed life into our constricted perspectives. He was the embodied response to what the religion of Jesus has to offer those whose backs are against the wall. Even today, Thurman's question continues to change my faith, while for many it continues to illuminate the path to faithful justice-seeking. ✕

**HOWARD THURMAN
ASKED, "WHAT IS THE
WORD OF THE RELIGION
OF JESUS TO THOSE
WITH THEIR BACKS
AGAINST THE WALL?"**

José Humphreys III is author of *Seeing Jesus in East Harlem: What Happens When Churches Show Up and Stay Put* and co-founder of Metro Hope Church in New York City.

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**"A RELATIONSHIP
WITH GOD ALSO
MEANS OUR BODIES
AND THE EARTH ARE
NOT SEPARATE."**



A wicker casket is placed in the soil. / Larkspur Conservation

‘FOR DUST THOU ART’

“Green burial” is a broad term that means burial without embalming, a concrete vault, or materials that don’t biodegrade. Prior to the Civil War, embalming wasn’t common practice in the U.S., and we didn’t have these concrete vaults lining the grave and further separating the body from the soil. I think there’s a growing sense now that a relationship with God also means our bodies and the earth are not separate.

There are other practices that are also more sustainable, like aquamation—a form of cremation using water and lye—or even body composting. Ask what’s available in your region. One of those options for me is conservation burial grounds where the land is protected in perpetuity; the money you spend to buy a plot goes toward the restoration of that land.

You can get a willow casket. You can make a pine casket. You can wrap your dad in tablecloth linens, as I did with my father. Those decisions can be important, but they go back to that relationship with the earth and with each other. There are people who are going to be carrying that shrouded body and putting it into the earth and covering it with soil, and children who will be throwing flower petals onto that earth.

It’s not just about the environment. It’s also about involving family and friends in these rituals of death which, from my experience, allow us to live into the loss of someone we love and carry their love with us. ✦

Mallory McDuff is the author of *Our Last Best Act: Planning for the End of Our Lives to Protect the People and Places We Love* and teaches environmental education at Warren Wilson College in North Carolina. She spoke with Sojourners’ Betsy Shirley.



THE ECO



OF FREE

NOMICS



**HOPE CREDIT
UNION PROVIDES
MORE THAN
INVESTMENTS
IN COMMUNITIES
OF NEED—
IT OFFERS A
NEW VISION
OF WHAT
FINANCIAL
JUSTICE MIGHT
LOOK LIKE.**

By Olivia Paschal

DOM

IN THE 1960S,

Louise Morphis stored her money in a neighbor's garage in the small town of Bynum, N.C. The rural Southern town's white-run banks refused to serve the Black community, so the neighbor, vice principal of the local Black public school, housed a credit union in his garage through the 1990s.

"Some people go to the bank, some people have to go to the garage," Morphis' grandson, William J. "Bill" Bynum, told *Sojourners*. Those early memories of economic injustice stayed with Bynum, who was born in East Harlem and moved with his family when he was age 5 back to Bynum—"an old mill town actually named after my ancestors who had once worked there as slaves," Bynum told the *Delta Business Journal* last fall.

In 1995, Bill Bynum helped found his own version of the "garage bank" his grandmother used. That seedling project, begun in the tithing room of a church in Jackson, Miss., became Hope Credit Union. Today, Hope has 23 branches and has generated more than \$3.6 billion in financing in the Mississippi Delta region and across the Deep South.

Hope found its purpose in places where—as in Bynum's hometown—entrenched generational poverty can be traced back to slavery. "If you look at a map of the country prior to the Civil War, and where slavery was concentrated, and a map today of where you have the worst job conditions, housing conditions, education outcomes, health outcomes, and where you have the fewest banks and the most payday lenders, they're the same," said Bynum, who serves as CEO of Hope Credit Union. "There's a legacy of under-investment and—no other way to describe it—institutional discrimination that limits opportunity."

Hope was first a stand-alone credit union and then a combination credit union, loan fund, and policy arm. Today, it's also a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), a federal designation for financial organizations working to expand economic opportunity in low-income and underserved communities. As of 2020, of Hope's more than 36,000 member households, 46 percent were previously unbanked or underbanked, which meant they lacked access to or formal relationships with traditional banking services. Twenty-eight percent of members have an annual income of less than \$19,000, and about 81 percent of members across five states—Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee—are Black, Hispanic, or Latino.

Bynum's latest innovation is convincing people who hold capital outside the region to deposit part of it with the credit union, thus expanding the credit union's ability

and organizations following the murder of George Floyd and subsequent protests. According to *The Washington Post*, the 50 biggest public companies in the U.S. and their foundations committed at least \$49.5 billion to addressing racial inequality in 2020. More than \$45 billion went to things such as loans and investments, rather than direct grants (a move criticized by some activists and academics for keeping money in the hands of the corporations in a way that could ultimately be profitable for those corporations). A portion of those investments—\$54 million—went to Hope.

"The movement for Black lives has really reshaped a lot of the conversation happening around reparations in this country," said Kate Poole, a co-founder of Chordata Capital, an anti-capitalist wealth management firm that works with wealthy people to redirect their investments and financial giving toward organizations aligned with racial and economic justice.



to finance small businesses, housing, and health care in underbanked communities. These investments are called "transformational deposits." As of November 2021, Hope had secured more than \$115 million from 350 businesses and individuals.

AN INFUSION OF FUNDS

Netflix was one of the first corporations to put its money into an account with Hope—\$10 million of it. PayPal also deposited \$10 million. Both were among the many major corporations that made promises to redistribute or invest capital, resources, and land to Black-owned businesses

Chordata Capital currently has more than \$80 million dollars in asset management with more than 30 clients. "They're trying to figure out, what does this commitment to racial justice look like? If I'm committed to reparations, what should be happening with my giving? What should be happening with my investing?" Poole said.

With a population of about 1,600, Itta Bena, Miss., is an example of how these deposits can change a local economy. The town is more than 92 percent Black, according to census data, with a median household income of \$17,210. Itta Bena doesn't have much capital. Hope is the only banking institution in town. Local deposits in Hope would be able to support just 12

home mortgages or two small business loans, Hope estimates. But with deposits imported from wealthy corporations in Silicon Valley or Wall Street, the credit union's capacity to make loans—and the community's capacity to own homes, start businesses, create jobs, and create opportunity—has been magnified.

Financial freedom—owning a business, owning a car, owning a home—often translates into social freedom for people who have faced severe oppression. Self-determination and economic opportunity, Bynum believes, are key steps to freedom for historically underserved communities. Hope sees its work in direct lineage with the civil rights movement, especially the turn toward economic justice embodied in Martin Luther King Jr.'s latter years. "The theology of [King's] life really emphasized economic opportunity and making sure that people had the ability, the resources to support their families and contribute to their economy, and a financial institution that supported that was essential," Bynum said.

**'THOSE OFTEN
PREYED UPON'**

Bynum and the pastor of Anderson United Methodist Church, where Hope began, originally conceived of Hope as a credit union that would serve people traditional banks didn't—whether because there were no banks in town or because they didn't qualify for services at the banks that did exist. These were people often preyed upon by payday lenders, check cashers, and pawn shops in the neighborhoods near the church. In a credit union, members pool their money together into a financial cooperative. Unlike traditional banks, they are member-owned and not-for-profit.

Every Sunday morning, Bynum said, the pastor invited people to "go out to the vestibule to open their account. It was a priority for the congregation." Eventually, the deposits numbered so many, and the need grew so large, that Hope expanded. The first expansion, in 2000, was with several groups of pastors and faith-based leaders around Jackson—including the Amos Network, Fellowship of Hope Ministries, and the 100 Concerned Clergy—who encouraged their communities to invest in Hope. The rapid growth moved Hope out of the church tithing closet and into a storefront in Jackson near several social welfare organizations, putting it in the vicinity of the communities it hoped to serve.



**"I DON'T THINK
THAT INVESTMENTS
ARE REPARATIONS.
BUT I DO THINK THAT
INVESTMENTS
CAN BE REPARATIVE."**



In 2001, Hope joined the Enterprise Corporation of the Delta (ECD), where Bynum ran the loan fund. ECD was originally reliant on philanthropic grants, and Bynum had been recruited from his work in North Carolina to oversee the project. But by 2001, ECD was running out of philanthropic money, which was even more scarce than it is today, and Hope lacked the infrastructure to meet the needs. So, ECD became Hope's sponsor, combining the resources of the credit union with the infrastructure of the loan fund.

Hope's role became even more vital during the months after Hurricane Katrina, when many Black and poor people were left behind by government relief efforts. Working alongside local organizations, foundations, and the utility company, Hope stepped up to fill the gap—opening accounts, making loans to thousands of home and small business owners, and drawing attention to recovery policy that disproportionately affected Black residents. Years later, during the Great Recession when many traditional banks closed, Hope didn't. Instead, Hope grew from seven to 30 branches in the decade following the recession, though some branches have since closed amid the pandemic. All the while, Hope pushed for policies that allowed federal funds to go to Community Development Financial Institutions rather than to bailing out the banks.

Hope's growth has often come in the form of acquiring other credit unions and moving into towns when banks close. "They've been very masterful at keeping a policy arm strong, keeping a strong communications front, while anchoring around

the old financial institution [of] a credit union,” said Lisa Mensah, president and CEO of the Opportunity Finance Network and former undersecretary of agriculture for rural development in the Obama administration, who was one of Hope’s early grant officers. “It’s been wise growth—bold growth, but wise.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has been no different. In addition to launching its transformational deposits program, Hope worked to make sure federal aid made it to the small business owners it serves. The first push was to help Black-owned and women-owned small businesses access Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans initially gobbled up by businesses that had relationships with big banks who had the resources to push applications through more quickly. At the onset of the pandemic, Black-owned businesses were closing at nearly twice the rate of white-owned ones. Hope’s policy arm successfully pushed for policy changes—including setting aside the first two days of the 2021 round of PPP funding for community lenders and earmarking funds for disadvantaged businesses that made PPP loans more accessible to smaller banks and thus to more

minority-owned small businesses. Nearly 2,700 small businesses, more than two-thirds of them Black- and women-owned, were kept from closing due to Hope’s work.

SHIFTING WEALTH AND POWER

The movement of money into Hope in recent months is part of a larger trend of wealthy people and corporations moving their money to Black-led financial institutions and organizations. Some see this work as reparative. Others view it as a redistribution in service of econom-

ic justice—a new vision of an economic structure that provides opportunity for everyone.

“I don’t think that investments are reparations. But I do think that investments *can* be reparative,” said Chordata Capital’s Poole. “We’re looking at shifting wealth and power by investing in the solidarity economy, investing in economic infrastructure that is redistributing the capital and the money and also the decision-making power over that capital.” Chordata Capital’s clients have \$11.7 million in investments with Hope, and Chordata Capital also directs investments to organizations such as the Ujima Fund in

**NEARLY 2,700 SMALL BUSINESSES,
MORE THAN TWO-THIRDS OF THEM
BLACK AND WOMEN-OWNED, WERE
KEPT FROM CLOSING DUE TO
HOPE’S WORK.**





Boston, a democratic, place-based investment fund that supports small business, real estate, and infrastructure projects in the city's working-class communities of color.

Poole feels her work with Chordata Capital is intertwined with her Judaism, especially because 2022 is part of a *shmita*—a sabbatical year—which happens every seventh year on the Jewish calendar. Historically during sabbatical years, Jews forgave debts, freed slaves, and let the land rest. “That seven-year cycle was included to interrupt wealth accumulation, interrupt this dividing and sharp binary between the rich and the poor, and to create this process where communities could experiment with how to allocate land, wealth, and power,” Poole said. “As I’m doing this work of dismantling capitalism and building the solidarity economy, it helps me tie my economic organizing into this historic tradition of redistribution.”

There are also organizations working to redistribute wealth not in the form of investments, but with grants. Liberated Capital, an initiative of the Decolonizing Wealth Project founded by author and activist Edgar Villanueva, takes money donated by people with wealth and uses it to make open-ended grants to Black-, Indigenous-, and people of color-led organizations working toward justice. This work is explicitly reparative, said Will Cordery, a senior adviser to the project. Its donors are people trying to address the extractive origins of their wealth and return it back to communities from which wealth has historically been extracted.

“We’re asking folks with wealth to trust the process, to give up power and control of those resources and to trust those who are most centered in the communities in which the money will be returned to actually know where those funds need to go,” Cordery said. Liberated Capital has worked with organizations across the country in Black, Native, and Latino/a communities, including the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund and the Hopi Foundation. Its initiatives include funding for direct cash assistance programs. “Everything this country has been going through in the past five, six, seven years has pushed people to reimagine and say, we have to do something different,” Cordery said.

THE NEW ECONOMY

One question at the forefront of those involved in economic justice and redistribution efforts is how to work within existing financial structures to create a new, more equitable economy. There are many different visions of what a new economy could look like, some more radical than others. But they all involve a vision of redistributing resources to repair historical wrongs and make economic opportunity—and economic freedom—more widely available.

To Bynum, a just society would be a fundamentally democratic one where everyone votes and where banks are universally owned and land more equitably

distributed. “Systems often limit that opportunity,” Bynum said. “The imbalance of ownership and assets is a real barrier to mutual prosperity.”

But if redistributive efforts within capitalist structures are to fundamentally change those structures rather than reinforce existing inequities, there must be some sort of shared vision, Cordery said. “If we have this North Star and have pushed ourselves to imagine something different, we can then be clearer in our purpose and understanding of how we move through the systems that we have now in order to fundamentally overturn them.”

Poole and the clients of Chordata Capital are working toward a “solidarity economy,” a concept that gained traction in the 1990s following social movements in Colombia, Chile, and France calling for participatory democracy, economic sustainability, cooperative structures, and public ownership. In a local or regional solidarity economy, the idea is that capital and community structures are controlled by the community—like the Ujima Fund’s democratic method of investing, or Hope’s model of mutual ownership and mutual control.

But if change is to occur, it will require a huge infusion of wealth into places like the Delta and into rural communities, Indigenous communities, and communities of color nationwide from which wealth has been extracted. “Our work is missionary in many ways,” Bynum said. “When I think of reparations, I think of repairing damage or repairing past wrongs. Places like the Delta have had wealth extracted and not been allowed to accumulate and grow for centuries. Importing deposits back into the Delta is a form of reparations.”

In December, Hope received \$88 million from the federal government’s \$8.7 billion Emergency Capital Investment Program—one of the largest community finance development programs in U.S. history. It’s also the largest investment Hope has ever received. “There are trillions of dollars going into the economy that can be so important in transforming communities—or they can widen the gaps,” Bynum said. Sustained by long-term investments from people inside and outside the communities it serves, Hope’s work moving forward is not just ensuring the gap doesn’t widen but closing it altogether. ✦

Olivia Paschal is a freelance journalist and a doctoral student in history at the University of Virginia.



‘PRAYERS ON PLATES’

A multifaith food rescue community
fills the food gap in Detroit.





By Olivia Diaz

Illustrations by
Blane Asrat

Food banks began to be overwhelmed with demand just a few weeks after COVID-19 pandemic mitigation measures began in the United States in March 2020. The economic fallout from stay-at-home orders and business closures hit hard and fast.

"There were people who were one paycheck away from lacking food access before the pandemic," Wren Hack, director of the Hazon Jewish Lab for Sustainability in Detroit, told *Sojourners*. "And when COVID hit, they joined the ranks of food insecurity."

In April 2020, more than 56,000 metro Detroiters said they often did not have enough to eat, according to a U.S. Census Pulse Survey. By early February of this year, about 87,400 said they often had insufficient food.

It is hard to predict when those numbers will improve, Hack said. Food access in Detroit is still a challenge despite businesses reopening over the past year. But Hack, alongside other leaders of several faith groups and nonprofits, have found ways to make food more accessible during volatile times. Their strategy: making sure scraps don't go to waste—even those that may seem inedible. They are working together to make sure leftovers from local restaurants and unsold produce from big-box grocers reach people in neighborhoods where food is in short supply. These faith leaders' logic is simple: Why should all that food be wasted when it can be served?

FILLING THE WIDENING FOOD GAP

Hack never intended to work in food rescue. But the unruly pandemic brought food access to the forefront of her work at Hazon. "People lost their jobs, and they were furloughed," she said. In June 2020, when COVID shutdowns were high, Detroit had a 43 percent unemployment rate, according to a post by the Detroit Metropolitan Area Communities Study at the University of Michigan. Even as of last August, unemployment hovered around 25 percent in the city.

"And at whatever means possible, you have to feed people, right?" Hack said. "You cannot let people go hungry."

But Hack recognized one person's or organization's efforts wouldn't change the system. Hazon partnered with Metro Food Rescue, a nonprofit founded by Chad Techner, to help with food collection and distribution. Techner, a local funeral director who also has culinary training, shared Hack's concerns about both hunger and wasted food. "I had approached Hazon just before the pandemic to talk about partnering for rescuing food in the events and catering

space," Techner said. "But then we found more opportunities in food rescue, working together in partnership and mentorship for that first year of COVID."

Hazon then met Antonio Hill, a minister based in Detroit's Rosedale Park neighborhood.

Hill was furloughed from his job as a security guard and wanted to help his community during the pandemic. He started making meals in his backyard with a grill he made from scrap metal.

"When you're hungry, you can't eat. You can't hear. You can't see—I would know," Hill said.

Hill, who describes his meals as "prayers on plates," wanted to give out meals because he struggles with food insecurity. He knows what it's like to be hungry and not know where to find a warm, home-cooked meal.

Hack was one of many who would drop food at Hill's house. She would pick up excess produce, meat, and nonperishable foods from big-box vendors and help transport it to local synagogues, churches, mosques, and other places in the city that provided free meals. Hack also reached out to leaders outside of faith communities. She found a hall monitor at a local school who was giving away food in her backyard. She got in touch with urban farms to help her in her efforts. The goal? To create a citywide ecosystem made up of neighbors helping neighbors.

Hack kept her efforts grassroots. She dropped off food to people who knew the people in their communities. It's essential that leaders know their people's diets, she said. "We know every community partner we work with," she said. "We know what they want and what they don't want."

Still, as food insecurity grew and the pandemic beat on, she questioned whether their efforts were enough. "There was such a determination of 'We're not going to let anybody be hungry,'" Hack said. "We were sustaining life, and we were utilizing food that would have harmed the environment and gone to waste."

"But does it change the system of access? No."

DEBUNKING THE FOOD DESERT

Detroit has been labeled an urban food desert for more than a decade, but the city has also experienced a renaissance for urban agriculture and out-of-the-box solutions to food insecurity. For the city's 139-square-mile footprint, there are hundreds of community gardens and at least 15 farmers markets, including historic Eastern



Chad Techner, founder of Metro Food Rescue, sorts through food during a neighborhood food distribution. / Sylvia Jarrus



A Metro Food Rescue truck. / Sylvia Jarrus



Donnesie Greenlaw has been volunteering with Metro Food Rescue for a year. "It's been a joy," she said. / Sylvia Jarrus

"IF THE WILLINGNESS IS THERE, THE DETROIT COMMUNITY CAN DO ANYTHING."

Market, the country's third oldest, which hosts more than 150 vendors, according to the Detroit Food Policy Council.

"When you say 'food desert,' people immediately think of a barren wasteland with no food," said Alex B. Hill, an urban studies professor at Wayne State University. "But there's a ton of food in Detroit."

Hill pointed to other barriers to food access, saying there is a key difference between access to food in general and access to healthy, affordable food. There are barriers that impede people's ability to find something they want to eat and that they can afford, he said.

Farmers markets can be more expensive and further away than the local convenience store—and that corner shop may also only be a quick walk away. Travel plays a significant role in food access, particularly in a pandemic, where public transportation may be scarce and people fear exposure to the virus.

And when there are nutritious resources out there, those options must be successfully promoted within the community—easier said than done. Education and information are their own hurdles.

In the face of all these structural is-

sues, food rescue is important, but it is not enough, said Malik Yakini, executive director of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, an organization dedicated to addressing food security through Black empowerment. "On a certain level, if people are hungry and you're able to provide food, that's a noble thing," Yakini said. "I'm not critical of people who are giving away food. I just don't think they should do it with the illusion that that's going to solve the problem."

Hack agrees with Yakini that food rescue doesn't solve underlying issues, noting the incremental barriers that lead to hunger. But it is still one of a broader set of tools to address people's immediate need for food. She and other faith leaders wondered: If food rescue can only do so much, is there nevertheless a way to make it better?

HEAPING LEFTOVERS

In efforts to make food rescue more environmentally sustainable, Hack turned toward the prepared food from restaurants and grocery stores that goes to waste. She began working with Darraugh Collins, the Detroit site director for Food Rescue US, an app that connects vendors with volunteers

to transport excess food to donation sites.

Experts estimate 2 million tons of food are wasted in Michigan annually. But with Collins' app, 7.69 million pounds, or about 3,845 tons of food, has been kept from going in the trash, she said. Collins works to transport any food that is edible.

"Prepared foods and already-made meals are really helpful," Collins said. "But the large food banks don't typically pick up prepared food, whether it's from grocery stores or even from restaurants. We make sure that food does not end up in the landfill either."

When Hack shifted to taking any edible food available, the market opened wider, she said. She would transport food from big-box vendors, local grocers, restaurants, pantries, and neighborhood homes that would otherwise go to waste.

Amid her efforts, Hack came across Make Food Not Waste, an organization that partners with Jefferson Avenue Presbyterian Church to make sure scraps are used within the city. Founded in 2017, the non-profit is made up of local chefs, who make meals in the church's basement—dubbed the Upcycling Kitchen—with assistance from church volunteers.

Danielle Todd, executive director of



Shakara Tyler (right), board president of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, with young people at a community garden. / Malik Yakini



Lead chef Ederique Goudia lays out frozen cookie dough on trays while chef Shay Goudia preps a pasta primavera in the Upcycling Kitchen. / Sylvia Jarrus



The Gardner family helps provide "prayers on plates." / Antonio Hill



Chef Shay Goudia, lead chef Ederique Goudia, and Shannon Zandee in the Upcycling Kitchen where they prep and cook meals at Jefferson Avenue Presbyterian Church in Detroit. / Sylvia Jarrus

Make Food Not Waste, said sustainable efforts both help the environment and alleviate hunger—but the food also needs to taste good. They work hard to “chef it up.”

“We really try to push the envelope in terms of what we can use in our meals,” Todd said. “We take leftover juice pulp from juicers, leftover grain from the brewing process from making beer. We have been taking in scraps from a local pierogi maker.”

Ederique Goudia, lead chef, said it was important to get creative to be more sustainable. “At one point in the season, there was an overabundance of Brussels sprouts—like eight truck pallets of Brussels sprouts,” Goudia said. “The first week, we made roasted Brussels sprouts. We made curry and put Brussels sprouts in the curry. But how many times can you feed people Brussels sprouts?”

Instead of dumping the rest of the batch, Goudia then made a pesto, hiding the taste of the Brussels sprouts, she said. Sometimes there are other surpluses, such as a bunch of tomatoes or too-ripe bananas, she said. But they always find a way to make it work. “I love to be able to rescue food and be very intentional about what I do with it, keeping in mind what I have previously served,” she said. “That’s important.” Goudia knew what

her community would want to eat. Like Hack, her efforts are grassroots.

Paul Booker, a church elder, said they served 175 families a week with meals prepared by Make Food Not Waste’s chefs, in a sustainable model that is a more charitable way to rescue food.

“I always say if you’re Christian, your heart’s to be working to help those that are in need,” Booker said. “Love God with all your heart, mind, body, and soul, and love your neighbor as yourself.” Those are the most important things. If you’re not doing that, you’re not heeding Christ’s commandment.”

SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

Food rescue can be exhausting, Hack said, reflecting on her efforts more than a year and a half after the pandemic hit the United States. “You’re always lifting, always moving boxes, always driving,” she said. “Yeah, it took a huge mental and physical toll.” In March 2021, Hack transitioned out of physically rescuing food to focus more on Hazon’s core mission of environmental sustainability. She handed the reins to Techner and Metro Food Rescue, who were better equipped to handle the coordination and deliveries.

“Food rescue is something that I can’t, in good conscience, stop doing,” Techner said. “It would be like me deciding to throw away 7,500 loaves of bread and 20,000 pounds of other food every single week.” The rescue system continues to thrive among the multifaith network that developed during the pandemic.

Hack admires all the people on the ground working for better food access, she said, noting the Detroit Food Policy Council and its partners. Free food may not be the sole solution, but Hack is still examining ways it can be better. She has been giving out composting kits to different community members and joining efforts to help people grow their own food.

“This is a community movement,” Hack said. “If the willingness is there, the Detroit community can do anything.”

Hack thinks, perhaps, other communities could try these sustainable solutions, too. ❖

Olivia Diaz is a crime and courts reporter at *The Post and Courier* in Charleston, S.C. Reporting for this story was supported by the Pulitzer Center.

From the book of Acts to prison abolitionists, mutual aid is a way to create networks of communal care.

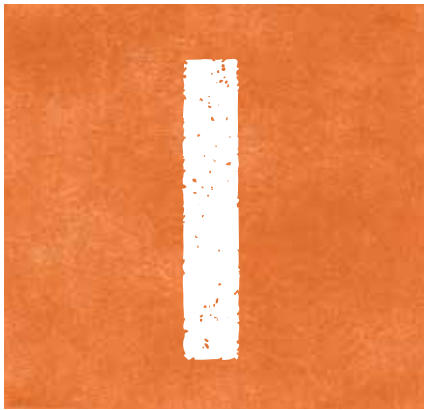
From the book of Acts to prison abolitionists, mutual aid is a way to create networks of communal care.





**By Isaac S.
Villegas**

**Illustrations
by Jam Dong**



In the early months of the pandemic, the “Care Bears” team of my local chapter of Southerners on New Ground (SONG), a Black, queer-led community of carceral abolitionists, reached out to members of the SONG family by phone. A small box arrived in the mail a few weeks later. The Care Bears had decided I’d benefit from a “a gift of love in a trying time”—tangerine tea, a candle, colored pencils, a notebook, and a tiny bottle of dandelion tincture made by the resident SONG herbalist.

I was drawn into the extended SONG family in 2017 when I joined the Black Mama’s Bail Out Action campaign. For Mother’s Day, SONG members paid the bail of mothers and caregivers held in the Durham, N.C. county jail because, like tens of thousands of people imprisoned in the U.S., they couldn’t afford their release. As a minister familiar with the jail’s protocols, I was called on to help obtain consent from the women being held. SONG raised the funds as part of a practice of mutual aid through paying off bail debt. “Money kept you in,” Pat Hussain, a co-founder of SONG said. “Black love got you out.”

My involvement with SONG has taught me the interconnections of Black feminism, prison abolitionism, and mutual aid—all as part of movements to create everyday institutions that nurture life. Abolitionism is about undoing the violence of incarceration, Angela Y. Davis writes in *Abolition Democracy*, “but it is also about building up, about creating new institutions.” And abolitionist Ruth Wilson Gilmore asserts that “abolition is about presence, not absence.”

Both Davis and Gilmore center the need for organized community to sustain life in a destructive world. They call for the creation of new institutions of mutual care while eroding the carceral system’s grip on society. With exceptional clarity, organizer and educator Mariame Kaba recently reissued this call: “Our work isn’t just a movement *against* cages and cops. It’s a movement *for* different ways of living together.” In this movement for a shared life where everyone can experience wholeness, “mutual aid exposes the failures of the current system and shows an alternative.”

Nearly 30 years ago, Mab Segrest, a co-founder of SONG, named this reciprocal commitment “queer socialism”—“a politic that does not cut us off from other people, but unites us with them in the broadest possible movement.” She expressed a shared need for “a less *lonely* society, where we think collectively about resources for the common good, rather than struggling individually against each other for material and psychic survival.”

The SONG vision for queer socialism, rooted in Black feminism, is a kind of mutual aid that cares for the material and psychological well-being of each member of the community. This conception of “the common good” is not a collection of values

or policies to impose upon the masses. Rather, the commitments are the building blocks for political institutions—beyond the state’s policies and policing—based on the practices of mutual care.

LIVES BOUND UP

My introduction to mutual aid happened before I joined SONG’s work—almost two decades prior when I became a member of a Mennonite congregation. On the Sunday I was presented for church membership, the gathered body pledged their commitment to sustain my life. “Sisters and brothers, do you accept your responsibility to care for the physical and spiritual needs of our new member?” the worship leader asked.

In the Mennonite tradition, mutual aid is intrinsic to an ecclesiology that understands the congregation as a body where the health of each member determines the health of the others. “Mennonite mutual aid is a reciprocal responsibility, based on biblical teaching, to provide material aid to other church members who face special economic and physical hardships,” Donald B. Kraybill and Willard M. Swartley explain in *Building Communities of Compassion: Mennonite Mutual Aid in Theory and Practice*. We belong to Christ as we belong with one another. “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it,” the apostle Paul told the church in Corinth. “If one member is honored, all rejoice together with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26).

Some churches take up an offering for a specific need in the community. Others, like the one I now pastor, include such funds as a line in our budget. In years when we expend more than we expect, the congregation is asked to replenish the fund. The deacons make the distributions, as one 16th-century Anabaptist congregation recommended, “so that the giver shall remain unknown as Christ teaches.” Our deacons also welcome requests from church members to give money to those outside the church body whose lives are bound up with ours. If money remains in the fund at the end of the fiscal year, our congregation selects a few organizations and gives it away as a modest act of economic redistribution.

Once, in the early years of my pastorate, a longtime member of the church requested a meeting to discuss her concerns about a candidate seeking membership. I expected that she would divulge a community secret or perhaps an unaddressed moral indiscretion and advise that the prospective member be held account-

**“MUTUAL AID EXPOSES THE FAILURES
OF THE CURRENT SYSTEM AND SHOWS
AN ALTERNATIVE.”**



able before we could, in good conscience, accept him. My speculations were very wrong. “I don’t think he has health insurance,” she said. “If he doesn’t, we need to figure out how to make sure he’s got coverage.” She recognized the meaning of saying “yes” to his membership—the responsibility for us, as a congregation, to be responsible for his care, including his physical health.

RADICAL ROOTS

Our work as Mennonites is not without precedent. In the early part of the 16th century, as the Radical Reformation spread within peasant Christianity in Europe, Anabaptists returned to the biblical vision in Acts for guidance on church life. “No one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common,” Luke the Evangelist documents (Acts 4:32). *Omnia sunt communia*, meaning “all things in common,” was the rallying cry of Anabaptist communities—a slogan they borrowed

from the Latin translation of the verse from Acts.

The ruling classes considered this way of life a threat to theirs and teamed up with theologians to squelch the movement. In 1525, Martin Luther did his best to protect the reformation from the rebellious “hordes of peasants” whose economic revolution he considered violent. “Let everyone who can, smite, slay, and stab, secretly or openly, remembering that nothing can be more poisonous, hurtful, or devilish than a rebel,” Luther wrote in a widely circulated pamphlet. “It is just as when one must kill a mad dog.”

The monied rulers doubled down on their investment in Luther’s theological ruthlessness with leaders legislating the persecution of Anabaptists to preserve the structures that governed society. Swiss cantons condemned adherents to Anabaptist faith and practice. “They [Anabaptists] hold and say that no Christian may either give or receive interest or income on capital, and that all temporal goods are free and common and everyone can have full prop-

erty rights to them,” read a 1527 decree. In 1571, when the Church of England affirmed their Thirty-nine Articles of Religion (still included in the *Book of Common Prayer*), they denounced Anabaptists: “The riches and goods of Christians are not common as certain Anabaptists do falsely boast,” the 38th article declares.

Anabaptists didn’t invent Christian communitarianism. In the *Didache*, an early church catechism, we read that a network of first-century congregations upheld a discipline of mutual aid. “Never turn away the needy; share all your possessions with your brother [and sister], and do not claim that anything is your own.” However, in 16th-century Europe, Christian rulers feared that a revival of this gospel command would level their hierarchies of wealth and power. In *The Revolution of 1525*, historian Peter Blickle named these two, irreconcilable social visions as “the communal Reformation” and “the ruler’s Reformation.” Anabaptist communities “sought to save the remnant of the communal Reformation by with-



drawing from the realm of this world, but the rulers mercilessly exterminated them.”

Not quite all were killed off, however. Scattered enclaves survived persecution and passed their version of the Christian faith from one remnant community to another—an invitation to mutual care in a violent world. Those Anabaptist groups would later come together as Mennonites, Hutterites, Amish, and Brethren. Mennonites in North America in the early 20th century would expand their mutual aid organizing to include relief work.

Benevolence within congregations overflowed into institutions for people beyond church membership rolls: health care services, famine and disaster relief, assistance for survivors of war, humanitarian work at home and abroad, and aid to neighbors across the street and around the world. These Christian commitments developed into various organizations: Mennonite Mutual Aid (renamed “Everence” in 2010), Mennonite Disaster Service, Mennonite Voluntary Service, Mennonite Central Committee, and Mennonite Health Services.

EMBODYING THE VISION

I write from what I’ve experienced as a Mennonite and as part of SONG’s extended family while also recognizing that there are other traditions of mutual aid. Through our SONG campaign to abolish money bail, I learned about the Believers Bail Out, an organization formed within Muslim communities in Chicago to collect their annual charitable contributions known as *zakat* to ransom people from ICE detention and the county jail. Masjid al-Rabia, a mosque and Islamic community center in Chicago, redistributed nearly \$70,000 during the first year of the pandemic.

“As our communities respond and persevere amidst COVID-19, health crises, and financial implications of missing or losing work, we also enter the eve of Ramadan,” the leaders wrote in a statement titled, “Radical Muslim Mutual Aid.” “This time reminds us of the importance of *zakat*, the Islamic mutual aid practice around redistribution of wealth.”

In the Christian faith, mutual aid is how we embody the vision St. Irenaeus of Smyrna preached in the second century: “The glory of God is the human being fully alive.” To live into the fullness of our humanity requires mutual dependence and a love enfleshed through our material lives. We do so not to replace the provisions of

society or to make the state’s resources redundant, but to prefigure a world without the economic violence of the everyday, a way of life that doesn’t deem some of us disposable. *None* of us are fully alive until *all* of us are fully alive. Mutual aid is our transformation from glory to glory into the fullness of God’s life for us. It is the incarnation of divine care.

A commitment to mutual aid asks the Mennonite membership question to each of us: “Do you accept your responsibility to care for the physical and spiritual needs of the members of our community?” We answer by forming ordinary institutions in our neighborhoods, workplaces, and churches. Together, we become the kind of community we want for the rest of society: a peoplehood in which we find ourselves fully alive.

Mutual aid institutions such as SONG are invested in a common good that is noncoercive, a way of life that doesn’t rely on the violence of law enforcement to guarantee political reforms. To give and receive mutual aid is an invitation to hold in common a commitment to the well-being and the wholeness of *everyone* within a community. As Suzanne Pharr, a SONG co-founder, explains: “How you treat each other should mirror what you’re demanding of society.”

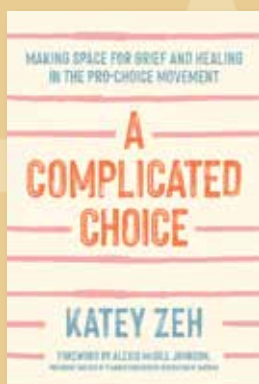
Mutual aid is a style of collective living that enacts a faith in God’s care for all of us. To hoard wealth is to disbelieve in God’s benevolence, to refuse the governance of grace in our economic decisions. Through our mutuality we entrust ourselves to God’s providence, not to our culture of greed. To develop communal institutions of sharing is to plant a seed in the lonely wastelands of our world and hope for the growth of a different society—or at least to nurture a sociality among ourselves while we wait for wholesale transformation, the transfiguration of all things.

Mutual aid is a prayer we offer with our lives, a petition for “this earthly life to swing up into heaven,” as the 16th-century reformer Thomas Müntzer wrote. Collectives of mutual aid and care inspire hope in us as we flesh out alternative political imaginations. As Mariame Kaba more recently framed it, “As an abolitionist, I’m trying to prefigure the world in which I want to live.” ✦

Isaac S. Villegas is pastor of Chapel Hill (N.C.) Mennonite Fellowship and president of the governing board of the North Carolina Council of Churches.

GREAT READS / Books to inform and inspire

SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION



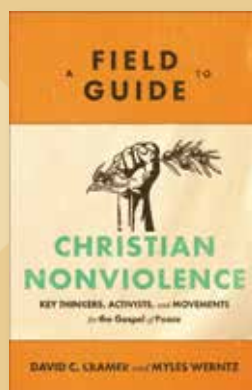
A Complicated Choice

Katey Zeh

Broadleaf Books

broadleafbooks.com

A Complicated Choice brings us along on the journeys of those who have had abortions, centering their lived experience. In so doing, Rev. Katey Zeh opens us to the complexities of our reproductive lives and invites us to a spiritual response rooted in compassion.



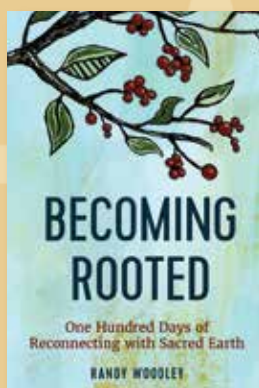
A Field Guide to Christian Nonviolence

David C. Cramer, Myles Werntz

Baker Academic

bakerpublishinggroup.com

Christian nonviolence is not a settled position but a vibrant and living tradition that includes mystics, feminists, liberation theologians, civil rights activists, Niebuhrian realists, and more. This book offers a concise introduction to the variety of recent movements within the broad stream of Christian nonviolence.



Becoming Rooted: One Hundred Days of Reconnecting with Sacred Earth

Randy Woodley

Broadleaf Books

broadleafbooks.com

Randy Woodley, an activist, scholar, and Cherokee descendant, guides us on a one-hundred-day journey to reconnect with the land around us, with the people native to that land, and with ourselves. Meditations and ideas for reflection and action help us become rooted in our relationship with creation and Creator.



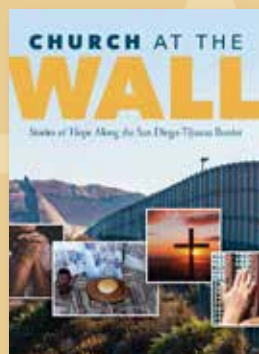
Body Becoming: A Path to Our Liberation

Robyn Henderson-Espinoza

Broadleaf Books

broadleafbooks.com

Activist and public theologian Robyn Henderson-Espinoza inhabits a trans, nonbinary, multiracial body—a body continually in discovery. Mixing memoir and faith, somatics theory and body practice, Henderson-Espinoza helps us recognize embodiment as the primary place of deep wisdom, where culture shifts originate—and a better world becomes, as we too become.



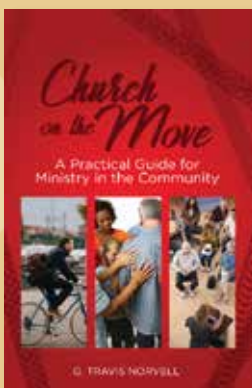
Church at the Wall: Stories of Hope Along the San Diego-Tijuana Border

Seth David Clark

Judson Press

judsonpress.com

Every Sunday, the author—U.S.-side pastoral coordinator of the Border Church—gathers with people of good will at Friendship Park to build the kingdom of God. Get to know this remarkable international church community—and its expressions of theology, justice, righteousness, and love—through the eyes of active participants.



Church on the Move: A Practical Guide for Ministry in the Community

G. Travis Norvell

Judson Press

judsonpress.com

Drawing on his experiences as a pastor who walked, cycled, and took the bus as he went about his work, Norvell proposes and provides practical ways for people of the "living church" to start moving in, around, and with their communities to truly move toward renewal and social justice.



Confronting Whiteness—A Spiritual Journey of Reflection, Conversation, and Transformation

W. Benjamin Boswell

Upper Room Books

upperroombooks.com

Confronting Whiteness: A Spiritual Journey of Reflection, Conversation, and Transformation is an intentional anti-racism experience for small groups of people racialized as White to help them identify and dismantle their Whiteness. The participant's and facilitator's guides use spiritual practices to guide them to confront and undermine the power of Whiteness.



Digital Communion: Marshall McLuhan's Spiritual Vision for a Virtual Age

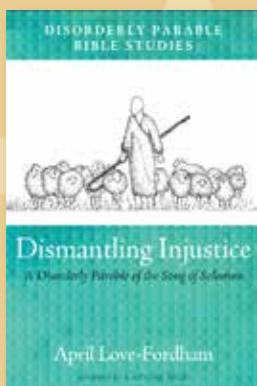
Nick Ripatrazone

Fortress Press

fortresspress.com

Considers the religious history of mass communication, from the Gutenberg Bible to literary forerunners of hypertextual language to McLuhan's vision of the electronic world as a place of spiritual exchange. The book reveals how we can cultivate a more spiritual vision of the internet, which is more critical than ever.

GREAT READS / Books to inform and inspire



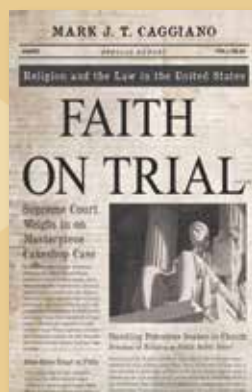
Disordering Parables

Dr. April Love-Fordham

Wipf and Stock Publishers

aprillovefordham.com

Winner of the 2021 Silver Medal for Christian Books, this Bible Study series weaves together a modern-day parable, serious biblical exegesis, and historical research, creating a challenging call to action without ever being dry. Contains suggested spiritual practices and discussion questions. Now available: Galatians, James, and Song of Solomon.



Faith on Trial: Religion and the Law in the United States

Mark J. T. Caggiano

Skinner House Books

shopinspirit.org

Complete with historical context, legal analysis, and specific examples of cases and statutes, *Faith on Trial* is an invitation to religious progressives and moderates to help put social progress and inclusion at the center of the national conversation about religion and the law.



Forgiveness and Reparation, the Healing Journey

Mpho Tutu van Furth

Fortress Press

fortresspress.com

Reparations is part of a process of atonement and restorative justice that acknowledges the damage done to the enslaved and colonized, heals and restores the lost humanity of the perpetrators, and repairs the violated relationships between the human and ecological victims and the human perpetrators.



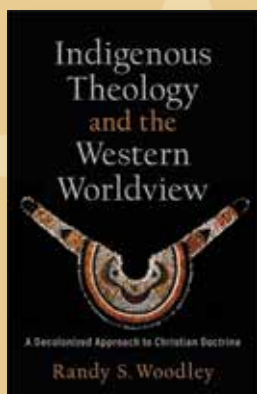
Fortune: How Race Broke My Family and the World—and How to Repair It All

Lisa Sharon Harper

Brazos Press

FortuneBook.US

In *Fortune: How Race Broke My Family and the World—and How to Repair It All*, activist Lisa Sharon Harper shares her lifelong journey to know her family's history, recovers the beauty of her heritage, exposes the brokenness that race has wrought in America, and casts a vision for repair.



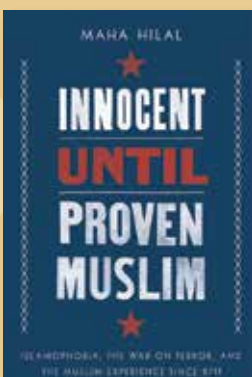
Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview

Randy S. Woodley

Baker Academic

BakerAcademic.com

"This book isn't business as usual. Woodley isn't business as usual either. And thank God! Woodley puts a mirror up to Western civilization and the Christian theology typical of it. The sight isn't pretty... But Woodley's Indigenous theology offers correctives. This book gives me hope!" — Thomas Jay Oord



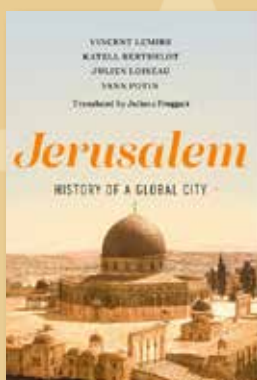
Innocent Until Proven Muslim: Islamophobia, the War on Terror, and the Muslim Experience Since 9/11

Maha Hilal

Broadleaf Books

broadleafbooks.com

In this powerful book, Dr. Maha Hilal offers an exacting analysis of the damaging effects of the War on Terror through an account of the resulting policies and the real experiences of discrimination and hate endured by Muslim Americans in the twenty years following the 9/11 attacks.



Jerusalem: History of a Global City

Vincent Lemire, Katell Berthelot, Julien Loiseau, Yann Potin, Juliana Froggatt (translator)

University of California Press

ucpress.edu

This book is an indispensable guide to understanding why the world converges on Jerusalem and offers a renewed understanding of the city's past and geography. This synthetic account is the first to make available to the public Jerusalem's whole history, informed by the latest archaeological finds, unexplored archives, and research.



Maria's Kit of Comfort

Kathy Fry-Miller, David Doudt

Brethren Press

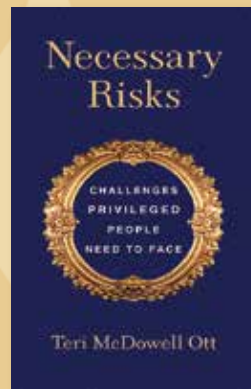
brethrenpress.com

A story of hope and healing, *Maria's Kit of Comfort* is a suitcase full of carefully selected toys that assists Children's Disaster Service volunteers in caring for children who have experienced trauma following natural disasters. Volunteers arrive at disaster sites and are able to promote healing through creative, expressive play.



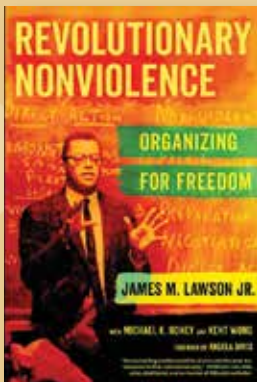
Mother God
Teresa Kim Pecinovsky
Beaming Books
beamingbooks.com

With lyrical, rhyming text and exquisite illustrations, *Mother God* introduces readers to a dozen images of God inspired by feminine descriptions from Scripture. This gorgeous picture book welcomes children into a fuller, more diverse understanding of what it means to be made in the image of God.



Necessary Risks: Challenges Privileged People Need to Face
Teri McDowell Ott
Fortress Press
fortresspress.com

Good people of privilege are increasingly aware of racial injustice but unsure what to do about it. Ott encourages readers to value risk-taking as the path toward a more equitable and just world, and she demonstrates that in the face of injustice, white silence and inaction are not neutral.



Revolutionary Nonviolence
James M. Lawson Jr.
University of California Press
ucpress.edu

Revolutionary Nonviolence is a crucial resource on nonviolent philosophy through the teachings of Rev. James M. Lawson Jr., one of the practitioners of revolution through deliberate and sustained nonviolence. Rev. Lawson's work as a theologian, pastor, and social-change activist has inspired hope and liberation for over sixty years.



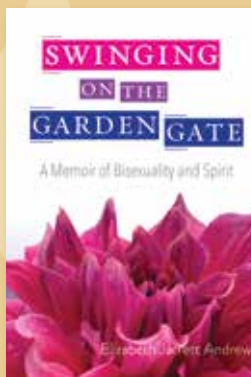
Refugia Faith: Seeking Hidden Shelters, Ordinary Wonders, and the Healing of the Earth
Debra Rienstra
Fortress Press
fortresspress.com

Christian spirituality and practice must adapt to prepare for life on a climate-altered planet. "Refugia" describes biological places of shelter where life endures in times of crisis. Ideally, these refugia endure and expand so that new life emerges. In this era of ecological devastation, how can we become people of refugia?



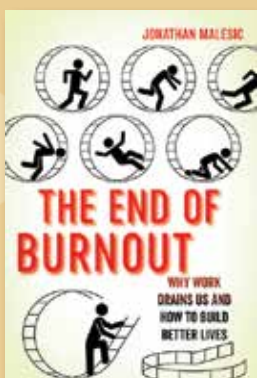
Sarah Rising
Ty Chapman
Beaming Books
beamingbooks.com

Inspired by the protests that happened during the Minneapolis Uprising after the police killing of George Floyd, *Sarah Rising* provides a child's-eye view of a protest and offers an opportunity for children to talk about why people take to the streets to protest racial injustice.



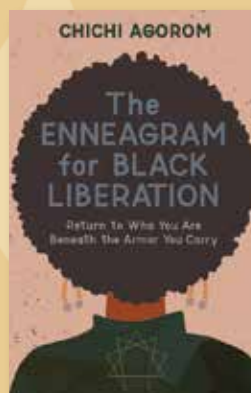
Swinging on the Garden Gate: A Memoir of Bisexuality and Spirit
Elizabeth Jarrett Andrew
Skinner House Books
shopinspirit.org

A stunning memoir of coming of age and coming out, *Swinging on the Garden Gate* describes a period of time in award-winning writer and teacher Elizabeth Jarrett Andrew's life when she came to know bisexuality as an embodied manifestation of divinity.



The End of Burnout: Why Work Drains Us and How to Build Better Lives
Jonathan Malesic
University of California Press
ucpress.edu

In *The End of Burnout*, Jonathan Malesic traces his own history as a theology professor who burned out of his job to frame this investigation of how and why we feel alienated and useless in our work. He offers the vocabulary to recognize burnout and find significance in our lives.

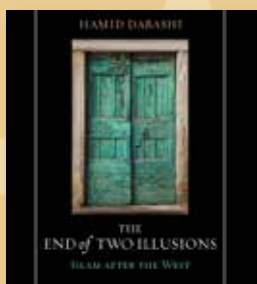


The Enneagram for Black Liberation: Return to Who You Are Beneath the Armor You Carry
Chichi Agorom
Broadleaf Books
broadleafbooks.com

For Black women, our Enneagram personality types are more than just our way of being in the world—they reflect the armor we use to protect ourselves. Certified Enneagram teacher Chichi Agorom invites us to claim the Enneagram as a tool for resilience building in the continued fight for liberation.

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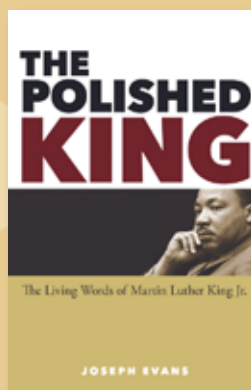
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The End of Two Illusions: Islam after the West

Hamid Dabashi
University of California Press
ucpress.edu

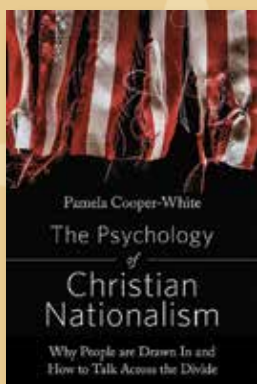
The End of Two Illusions is a daring and groundbreaking work that dismantles the most dangerous delusions manufactured between two vastly abstractions: "Islam" and "the West." Dabashi shows how the imagined divides have defined their entanglement and clears the way toward a far more liberating imaginative geography of the world.



The Polished King: The Living Words of Martin Luther King Jr.

Joseph Evans
Judson Press
judsonpress.com

James Baldwin considered the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to be a "Polished Preacher." This book weaves Baldwin's poetic and fiery words, passion for justice, and admiration of King's oration into a detailed, thought-provoking examination of the rhythm of determination and transformative power in King's speaking, writing, and faith.



The Psychology of Christian Nationalism: Why People Are Drawn In and How to Talk Across the Divide

Pamela Cooper-White
Fortress Press
fortresspress.com

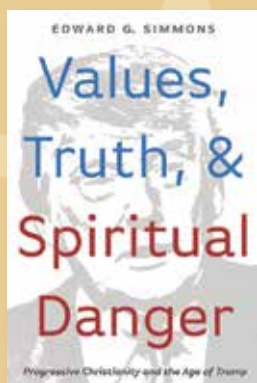
Cooper-White discusses polarization in America and uncovers the troubling extent of Christian nationalism, exploring its history and deep psychological roots. She presents ways in which advocates for justice can safely and effectively attempt to talk across the deep divides in our society.



Tolerance Is a Wasteland: Palestine and the Culture of Denial

Saree Makdisi
University of California Press
ucpress.edu

Tolerance Is a Wasteland explores many acts of affirmation and denial where the effects of destruction and repression are reframed, inverted into affirmations of liberal virtues that can be championed. Despite evidence of racism and human rights abuse, Israel has long been embraced by the most liberal sectors of society.

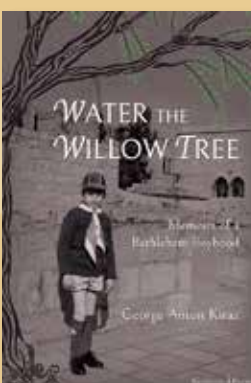


Values, Truth, and Spiritual Danger: Progressive Christianity and the Age of Trump

Edward G. Simmons
Wipf and Stock Publishers
wipfandstock.com

"Edward Simmons proclaims the ethics at the center of the biblical traditions and prophesies what happens when that message goes unheeded." —Amy-Jill Levine

"A must-read for anyone struggling to reconcile religion with the realities of the twenty-first century." —David Ludden



Water the Willow Tree: Memoirs of a Bethlehem Boyhood

George Anton Kiraz
Gorgias Press
gorgiaspress.com

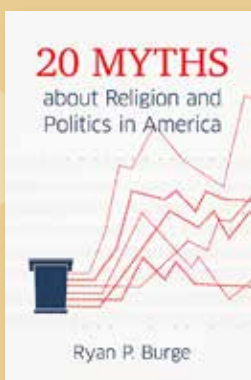
This engaging memoir, of a Palestinian youth grappling for a sense of identity in the midst of the complicated Muslim, Christian, and Israeli conflicts, provides a unique view into the life and history of a largely invisible community of Aramaic speaking survivors of genocide, bringing to life their often-neglected stories.



You Mean It or You Don't: James Baldwin's Radical Challenge

Jamie McGhee, Adam Hollowell
Broadleaf Books
broadleafbooks.com

It is not enough to hold progressive views on racial justice, LGBTQ+ identity, and economic inequality. Through a rich examination of James Baldwin's writing and interviews, this book spurs today's progressives from conviction to action, from dreaming of justice to living it out in our communities, churches, and neighborhoods.



20 Myths about Religion and Politics in America

Ryan P. Burge
Fortress Press
fortresspress.com

The way most people think about religion and politics is only loosely linked to empirical reality. Instead, our thinking is based on anecdotes, news headlines, or lies told by voices with an agenda. Striving to be an impartial referee, Burge debunks twenty myths, using rigorous data analysis and straightforward explanations.

THOUGHTS ON A SHIFTING CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AFTER 35 YEARS.

By Danny Duncan Collum

Eyes & Ears





I wrote my first “Eyes and Ears” column in January 1987 when I was a *Sojourners* staff editor. Over the ensuing years, I’ve changed from Prot-

estant to Catholic, from full-time journalist to full-time teacher, and from city mouse to country mouse. I’ve been married to Polly Duncan Collum and helped raise four children. Through all that, I’ve kept this column going, but now I’m pulling the plug to make way for whatever’s next.

In my first column, I set out a twofold purpose for this space. I intended to track the merger of politics and popular culture that began in earnest with the 1980 election of a movie star president. I noted then that our public life was largely being reduced to an “ephemeral community of shared media experience,” by which, at the time, I meant mostly Hollywood movies and various televised spectacles.

By the time we elected a reality TV star as president, the convergence of politics and popular culture was already long complete, except that, in a world of microtargeted messaging, there is no longer even much “shared media experience” from which to forge a community.

My second rationale for starting the column, however, has held up a little better. I noted way back then that, in both politics and popular culture and in the intellectual netherworld of think tanks and commentary journalism, the very definitions of terms such as “America,” “democracy,” and “Christianity” were up for grabs. In 1987, I called this a “war of ideas” and it continues with a vengeance, though often degenerating into an emotional war of identities.

**THE ALGORITHMS
OF SOCIAL MEDIA
AND SEARCH ENGINES
WRAP US IN COCOONS
OF PEOPLE LIKE US,
WHO THINK LIKE US.**

However, “stuff happens.” And in these 35 years, two big things have happened that exploded many of my expectations and drastically altered the cultural landscape.

The first, obviously enough, was the expansion of the internet into everyday life, with all the hope and havoc it has wrought among us. The second has been the persistent stagnation and decline of wages for the average American worker alongside the stupefying rise of the billionaire class and its army of minions in the professional-managerial elite.

In its first decades, the internet seemed like a great idea. Until the 1990s, to have your idea, story, or call to action reach a mass audience, you had to win the approval of one of a relatively few media organizations, almost all of which were for-profit corporations. The only alternative was to raise huge sums of money to print and distribute the message yourself. Then, suddenly, for much less money you could put up a website that could possibly reach hundreds of millions of people. The potential for democratizing politics and culture was mind-boggling.

However, by the turn of the century, those new democratic vistas were thoroughly colonized by corporate America. By the time average, non-techie Americans started logging on to the internet in large numbers, they saw a medium that seemed to offer mostly shopping, gossip, and secondhand news. As of 2019, according to the network intelligence firm Sandvine, more than 43 percent of all global traffic on the internet went to sites controlled by only six U.S.-based corporations—Alphabet (parent company of Google), Facebook, Netflix, Amazon, Microsoft, and Apple.

Worse yet, the often unedited, unmoderated, and unaccountable nature of this new mass medium has polluted the public square with dangerous falsehoods. Meanwhile, the algorithms of social media and search engines wrap us in cocoons of people like us, who think like us—and fuel our outrage at everyone who doesn’t.

In addition, the owners and operators of the digital domain have been among the big winners in the great economic stratification of recent decades. Several of the billionaires who saw their wealth increase by 62 percent during the COVID-19 pandemic

cont’d on page 42



HEROES ARE OVERRATED

By Da'Shawn Mosley

When I think about the 2015 HBO miniseries *Show Me a Hero*, the person who first comes to mind is Nick Wasicsko. This is understandable: According to its HBO blurb, the politician is the show's main protagonist. But this scripted drama is about the real-life 1980s and '90s struggle for public housing in Yonkers, N.Y., when low-income people of color worked for integration and the city government resisted—even as daily contempt-of-court fines threatened to bankrupt it. So, it feels weird to focus on the white Mayor Wasicsko, although he (eventually) fights for the public housing too.

This discomfort may be the point. “The thing I don’t buy anymore,” said the show’s co-writer, David Simon (*The Wire*, *Treme*), “is if we elect the right guy, the great men of history, that’ll save us. ... Our problems are systemic, and we’re going to have to solve them as people.”

This is exactly what the characters of color in *Show Me a Hero* do. Wasicsko may seek to overcome political hurdles—including how the Catholic Archdiocese of New York retreats from its decision to devote some of its land to public housing after it upsets white Yonkers residents, including parishioners. But the people of color whose lives are in limbo work to save themselves, too. They are not powerless.

I won’t say anything more about what happens: I don’t think watching the show would have been as thrilling if my husband and I knew what was going to happen next, or at the end. The title is a hint, though. “Show me a hero and I’ll

write you a tragedy” is how the full F. Scott Fitzgerald quote goes, and that’s how the six-episode miniseries unfurls, too.

I can’t tell you that *Show Me a Hero* is the best show I’ve ever seen. Although HBO has never steered me wrong, some of the dialogue feels clichéd, undercutting some supporting performances. It even hurts the Golden Globe-winning performance of the Juilliard-trained Oscar Isaac, who plays Wasicsko.

But perhaps Simon would support this critique, to diminish the deification he received for the stellar, groundbreaking drama *The Wire*. And ultimately the power of *Show Me a Hero* is undeniable. It captures brilliantly and in-depth the ambitions of a young mayor and the low-income people of color whose futures have become intertwined with his own. We see Simon’s point that neither the development of a crisis or the solution depends on a singular soul. And we see each person’s humanity in a broken system that must change to lift all lives. ✦

Da'Shawn Mosley

(dashawn-mosley.com) is a former *Sojourners* associate editor and lives in the Washington, D.C. metro area.

CREATIVE ACTION

Capturing the vibrant 2019 protests that pushed Puerto Rico’s governor to resign, the documentary *Landfall* examines life after Hurricane María and the debt and environmental crises that devastated the U.S. colony long before, prompting local resistance and creative action.

Blackscrackle Films



A Powerful Voice

Opening the 10th season of PBS’ America ReFramed, *Fannie Lou Hamer’s America* tells the story of the activist through her own words. Speeches, personal interviews, and songs illuminate the civil rights movement leader’s path from sharecropping in Mississippi to 15 years of influential activism. **WORLD Channel / American Documentary**



Demanding Dignity

Journalist Kim Kelly resurrects erased labor stories in her book *Fight Like Hell: The Untold History of American Labor*. In demanding dignity, people of color, women, queer people, disabled people, sex workers, prisoners, and poor people ensured the rights that workers have today. **Atria/One Signal Publishers**

cont'd from page 40 have ties to those six big tech companies. And their tech-savvy underlings are doing all right, too. From 1970 to 2018, the share of U.S. income going to the top 20 percent increased from 29 percent to 48 percent, while the share going to low-income and middle-income households both declined. This has also meant an ever-growing gap between the earnings of college graduates, who are still only a little over a third of the U.S. adult population, and everyone else.

The rapid growth of this economic divide, along lines imposed by education status, has left many Americans utterly alienated from the people who dominate our media and cultural institutions. Combine that with the cocoon effect of the internet and you get a population terminally distracted by a perpetual culture war over bathrooms, vaccinations, masks, history curricula, etc.

THOUGH THIS COLUMN has never featured much overtly religious language, I've always approached these matters from the starting point of Christian faith. And, as I see it, the Christian social mission is to do whatever we can in our immediate circumstances to bring the life of this world into closer alignment with the values of the Kingdom of God.

Of course, this is always a relative matter. In our lifetimes, we probably won't see the first become last, but we could possibly see a nation in which the 50 richest individuals don't own more wealth than the entire bottom half of the population. We may not vanquish death and disease, but we could see a nation in which all people can go to the doctor when they are sick. We may never, in this life, each get to sit, unafraid, beneath our own vine and fig tree, but we could have a guarantee of dignified work at a wage that supports a family.

Anyone in the U.S. who is genuinely interested in accomplishing those sorts of things should know that the only path forward is a majoritarian alliance of low- and moderate-income people, across all racial and cultural divisions, based upon shared economic interest and human values. That alliance must include most of the people who marched for Black lives in the summer of 2020 and at least some of the people who voted for Trump that November.

At the moment, I see little cause for optimism about that kind of change. I once thought popular culture could bring people



together. After all, popular music especially has done so; for decades it's been a place where all the silenced people of America could find a loud and rebellious voice. However, in the digital age, even music further atomizes us. I have my Spotify recommendations, and you have yours.

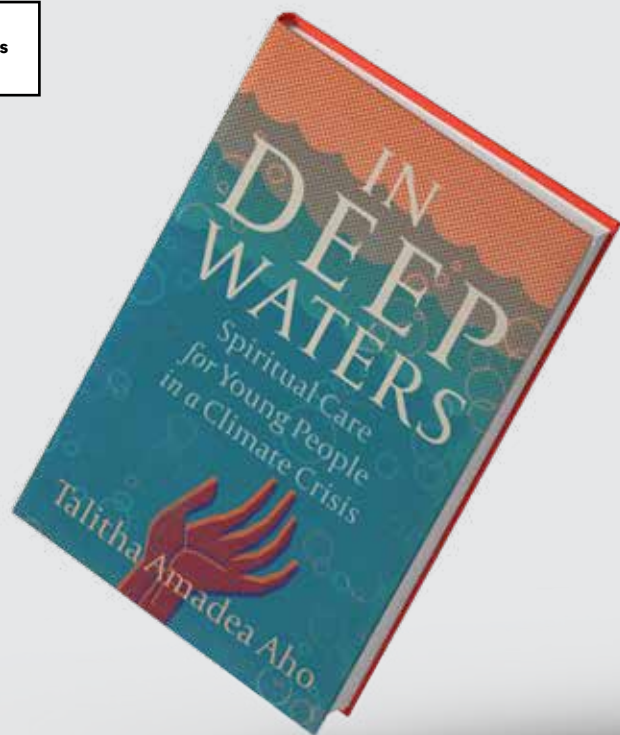
Those of us who are believers must hope that our spiritual traditions can pull us together around a vision of economic and racial justice. And in many places, there are local congregation-based community organizations doing just that. However, far too many of our religious institutions (progressive and conservative alike) are captured by one or the other of the culture war camps and no longer offer a unifying alternative.

What little hope I see on the horizon these days comes from the unions. Organized labor is a shadow of what it was 50 years ago, but it does still have 14 million members, and those 14 million people look like America. More than 37 percent of them are Black, Hispanic, Asian-Pacific, or other nonwhite; 47 percent are female. They are all united around the goal of redistributing wealth and power in the U.S., and, as the recent wave of strikes and organizing drives have shown, they are on the move in the post-pandemic economy.

So, my last thought as a regular *Sojourners* columnist is this: In 12-step groups, there is a slogan that says, "Look for the similarities, not the differences." That strategy works well for those groups of disparate individuals who are trying to help each other with their common problem. I suspect that it could also work in the civic arena where the bottom 80 percent of us, from a wide range of backgrounds and cultural identities, share common problems of inequality, injustice, and powerlessness. ♦

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University.

**BELIEVERS MUST
HOPE THAT OUR
SPIRITUAL
TRADITIONS CAN
PULL US TOGETHER
AROUND A VISION
OF ECONOMIC AND
RACIAL JUSTICE.**



HOW DO WE FIND OUR PLACE IN A WORLD ON FIRE?

having similar talks with my own children, ages 3 through 8, in a few years. Already, my 8-year-old has said about climate change, “It’s too late.”

Aho offers spiritual strategies to care for the young people in our lives (and perhaps ourselves) who feel betrayed by their elders’ inaction and, worse, their minimizing of the pain. But first, she says, we need to jump in. The waters are rising and “coming of age during the climate emergency is like learning to swim during a flood.” Can we join our young people whose futures have been thrown into the deep end?

The spiritual needs she identifies for young people in climate crisis seem basic: belonging, purpose, and interpersonal accountability. But how do we find our place in a world on fire? How do we grasp our deep belovedness, witnessing how awfully humans have botched our earth-keeping duties? How do we make individual course corrections while keeping an eye toward necessary structural changes? How do we maintain stamina when we know things will get worse before they get better (*if they get better*)? How do we speak and receive truth without becoming defensive?

Aho deftly uses the swimming metaphor to address all these perplexing questions, and surprisingly few times does the metaphor feel overworked. After all, we are indeed in deep waters, figuratively and literally. What I love best are her accounts of these big conversations with the youth in her care. They model for me the nonanxious presence I want to be for my children and other young people in my life as they come of age in a world falling apart. Beyond that, they contain whiffs of a Holy Presence, which Aho writes is like the ocean, “always there for us, in the mystery, in the change, in the constancy.”

May we care enough to jump in, trust enough to float, and imagine a better future we can all swim toward together. ✕

Livan Huska is a freelance journalist and the author of *Hurting Yet Whole: Reconciling Body and Spirit in Chronic Pain and Illness*.

LEARNING TO SWIM DURING A FLOOD

In Deep Waters:
Spiritual Care for Young People
in a Climate Crisis,
by Talitha Amadea Aho

Fortress Press

“Who are these young people?” I asked repeatedly while reading Talitha Amadea Aho’s debut book, *In Deep Waters: Spiritual Care for Young People in a Climate Crisis*. The Presbyterian pastor writes of her adventures shepherding the youth of her Oakland, Calif., church through beach trash pickups, worsening fire seasons, the pandemic, and mundane youth group activities that lead to big conversations on God’s involvement and human response amid climate emergency.

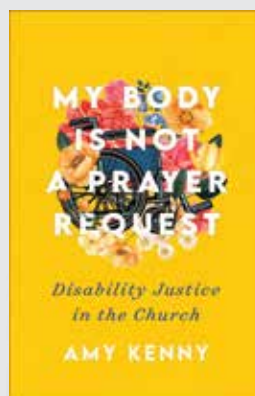
Aho recounts driving a van full of youth near the 2018 wildfire that destroyed Paradise, Calif., to get to a retreat. “Whatever, we can deal with it. Breathing isn’t the only thing in life,” says one youth. Another, like a prophet, observes, “The Earth will survive; it’s a living organism, and we are the infection on it, and the Earth is cooking up a fever to kill us off.”

It may be that these West Coast youth are more clear-eyed in their diagnoses, living through an apocalyptic reality that we are all careening toward. I can imagine

WE WORSHIP A DISABLED GOD

My Body Is Not a Prayer Request:
Disability Justice in the Church,
by Amy Kenny

Brazos Press



Some churches have fought to be exempted from the Americans with Disabilities Act, have interpreted scripture in ways that cause violence against disabled people, and are often rife with ableist microaggressions unique to religious communities. Amy Kenny's *My Body Is Not a Prayer Request*—part memoir and part disability justice hermeneutic—is a book the church desperately needs.

Kenny encounters strangers, many of them Christians, who comment on her body. They describe their ableist version of heaven, pray over her without consent (she refers to these people as “prayerful perpetrators”), ask for personal medical information, and give pitying glances. “I wish I was whole in their minds,” writes Kenny, “enough to exist without needing a prayerful remedy to cast out my ‘demons,’ a full human who has something to offer other than a miraculous narrative.”

While many fetishize Kenny's disability and medical history, her needs are ignored, as physical spaces, including churches, are often inaccessible. The disregard for people with disabilities can take many forms. A recent example: In a *New York Times* op-ed published in January amid the omicron surge, Anglican priest Tish Harrison Warren urged churches to drop their online services. Access to virtual services is vital for immunocompromised people and others for whom in-person services can have deadly consequences.

Kenny, who is white, mentions how skin color and education affect her story and acknowledges the limits of her perspective: “Disability is a broad constellation of experience, and I don't represent the entire community.” But the book could have benefited from more acknowledgement that people who hold multiple marginalized identities contend with additional barriers and mistreatment.

Similarly, Kenny might have brought in other voices when she wrote about individuals with intellectual

disabilities in the chapter “Disabled God.” Kenny compares inclusive communication practices (acknowledging that speech is one form of communication, as well as ASL, vocalizations, gestures, and augmentative and alternative communication devices and systems) to the Holy Spirit communicating through “groanings.” I found that passage and the application slightly problematic, since not all nonspeaking people have intellectual disabilities, and many people with intellectual disabilities do use speech. Still, as a disabled person, I find power in Kenny's larger concept of a disabled God: I am not a deficient image of the Creator but rather emanate God in all that I am.

This contrasts with the prevalent ableist language in our society. As Kenny writes, “disability metaphors allow everyone to agree my body is bad. I am not your metaphor.” Kenny lists ableist things people have called her or told her; these examples demonstrate how medical and religious models of disability are toxic and harmful.

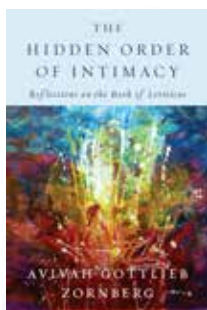
Ultimately, Kenny challenges the church to instead take up a theology of a disabled God—from the wheels on the fiery throne of heaven (Daniel 7:9) to the resurrected Jesus' stigmata. May Christians, both laypeople and clergy, approach this text with a soft heart and emerge from their reading to pursue disability justice. ♦

Elisa Rowe (@elisacwrites) is a writer and poet living in Boston. You can find more of her work at elisarowe.com.

THE GRIP OF IDOLS

An excerpt from *The Hidden Order of Intimacy: Reflections on the Book of Leviticus*,
by Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg

Schocken Books



Immediately after the first commandment (“I am the Lord your God who has brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves”) comes the second commandment—almost as though after a colon: “You shall have no other gods in My presence.” The Exodus represents a break for freedom, and the construction of a new identity based on that freedom. An important aspect of freedom is the separation not just from Egypt but from the fascination with Egypt’s gods. The Exodus is an iconoclastic project; entering a covenant with the One God is an attempt to break the idolatrous spell.

Eric Santner offers a psychoanalytic understanding of what he calls *Egyptomania*. His concept of Egyptomania can be connected with the rabbinic wordplay on *Mitzraim/meitzarim*—Egypt/straits. In this symbolic world, Egypt becomes a Jewish cultural memory, the site of constraint, of constriction, angst, anguish. This rigidity is associated with the practice of idolatry. Freedom would mean loosening the grip of the fascinations and defense mechanisms of a hindered life. ...

The biblical law is clear: “They shall no longer offer their sacrifices to the goat demons after whom they stray. This shall be to them a law, for all time, throughout the ages” (Lev. 17:7). But the very force of this taboo indicates the counterpressure of reality. For, in fact, the fascination and the struggle with the goats and bulls of the past will linger. Idolatry will return periodically, in repressed form, to create perpetual unease. ❖

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GHOST NEBULA

By Laura Reece Hogan



*Touch me and see, because a ghost does not
have flesh and bones as you can see I have.*
—Luke 24:39

So easily startled by vastness, dark
distances, arrival, they were terrified by him
that night glimmering in their midst.
Jesus knew they needed to finger the familiar
relief of bones under warm flesh to believe
the body, pale star
studding their peripheral vision, a specter
rattling even Peter, who had seen the not-
ghost of him before, walking the sea. Jesus
knew their need to know he hungered, tasted
the tilapia baked in olive oil with salt, lemon,
tangy fingers to mouth.

We also mistake for shade
his spilling, think we grasp the ghost of him
across the universe—filaments of light,
nebular veils. His words cast the contours,
recognizable until we see the not-
dead of him, our terrified minds
opened to enormity, but gently. How he fishes,
the rock and creak of boat, rough coils of net,
convinces us to touch
the wooden hull, that we know this rising
scent of salt on interstellar wind, drifting shape
of wave, of star, simple as flesh and blood.

Laura Reece Hogan is author of *Litany of Flights*, winner of the Paraclete Poetry Prize. She lives in California.

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SOJOURNERS

GOD CALLS PARTNERS, NOT MARIONETTES

Scripture passages are
from the Revised Common
Lectionary, Cycle C

By T. Denise Anderson



Living the Word

To whom do our lives belong? The Barmen Declaration, written in 1934, was a theological statement by a small group of German Protestants in response to

the growing pro-Nazi movement within German Christianity. It stated, “We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords—areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him.” The signers of the Barmen statement said this because the confederation of German Protestant churches (which would eventually become the state church under the Nazi Third Reich) was demanding allegiance to the state in all areas of life and faith. The close of Eastertide gives us an opportunity to consider, in our own time and place, to whom we belong and what that means for how we live now amid echoes of authoritarianism.

In this season, we read of Jesus’ growing influence and what it meant for his disciples to reckon with a world in which resurrection is possible. If the threat of death is muted, if not even prison can contain the good news, then how emboldened will a small-but-mighty movement become in the face of a powerful empire and its proxies? Can this good news still reach us—we who are worn from the immense grief of the last two years? Can we find our second wind to share this good news and build God’s reign? I believe Eastertide has a particular resonance for these times.

T. Denise Anderson is acting director of Racial Equity and Women’s Intercultural Ministries at the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and lives in Louisville, Ky.

THE DISCIPLES NEEDED SOMETHING STRONGER THAN EMPIRE TO HOLD THEM TOGETHER.

MAY 1

HEAR, MY PEOPLE

ACTS 9:1-20; PSALM 30; REVELATION 5:11-14;
JOHN 21:1-19

The texts for the third Sunday of Easter invite us to consider the claims we and God make concerning each other. Acts 9 tells the story of Saul’s dramatic conversion and Ananias’ internal struggle about ministering to a notorious enemy of the church. Jesus had specific intentions for Saul, but those intentions needed to be catalyzed by the cooperation of both Saul and Ananias. Could Saul transform a lifetime of socialization? Was Ananias willing to not only face someone who had menaced his community but also *bless* him? This is a crisis of conviction for both.

In John’s gospel, Jesus appears to the male disciples for the third time after his resurrection. On the shore of Galilee, Jesus cooks breakfast and says to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” (21:15). “Simon” is a Hellenization of the Hebrew word *shimon*, meaning “one who hears.” It’s the root of the Jewish prayer *Shema Yisrael*: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Jesus asks Simon Peter, “Do you love me?” three times. Does Peter hear? Earlier, Peter had denied knowing Jesus three times, to escape getting lynched alongside him. With each inquiry, Jesus gives Simon Peter an opportunity to retract his rejections. Not only can Simon Peter offer a retraction, but he can put his love into service: “Feed my lambs ... Tend my sheep ... Feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17).

MAY 8

BECOMING SHEEPISH

ACTS 9:36-43; PSALM 23;
REVELATION 7:9-17; JOHN 10:22-30

On a “Good Shepherd Sunday” some years ago, I was the guest preacher at a local church. A parishioner shared with me a fascinating fact about sheep: Every day they’ll approach their shepherd to be touched on the nose. This is the sheep’s way of acknowledging their shepherd and an opportunity for the shepherd to acknowledge them in return. No one ever tells sheep to do this. They do it instinctually.

In John’s gospel, Jesus teaches that his sheep know to acknowledge their Shepherd by how they live (10:27). One lives *into* being a sheep. And an intimacy develops between sheep and Shepherd that simply cannot be counterfeited.

That's what the disciple Tabitha responds to when she hears Peter call her name, an act that raises her to life (Acts 9:40).

Tabitha's resurrection in Acts serves as evidence of the "eternal life" (John 10:28) promised by the Shepherd. Psalm 23 expresses trust in this powerful care but recognizes the "valley of the shadow" and the presence of "enemies." John's eschatological vision of those who've overcome "the great ordeal" casts a vision of the Lamb overcoming violence and death (Revelation 7:14). There is an ever-present danger in these passages, even while under the Shepherd's care. Our right living does not shield us from threat. Will that danger change us? Will it make us callous and hopeless? Or will we remain steadfast in our commitment to be sheep who entrust their care to the Shepherd?

MAY 15

KINGDOM OF LOVE

ACTS 11:1-18; PSALM 148;
REVELATION 21:1-6; JOHN 13:31-35

Why does Jesus say he's giving a "new commandment, that you love one another" (John 13:34)? The commandment to love is not new, so what is "new" about Jesus' mandate before he goes to the cross? Building upon the primary and secondary commandments, Jesus undergirds them with a new standard. Jesus instructs the disciples to love each other as *he* has loved them—and *will* love them. This love will require the disciples not only to love God with "all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5) and to "love your neighbor as yourself" (see Leviticus 19:18), but to lay down their lives for one another. Jesus has shown such love for them in his life and will show an even greater love as he goes to his death for them.

In Acts 11, Peter's defense of his engagement with the Gentiles, who are uncircumcised and thus "unclean," also reveals God's hand in something that appears new to this community. John's eschatological vision shows the expanse of God's reign, where there is a "new heaven and a new earth" and God dwells among humanity. In Psalm 148, praise of God emanates from beyond Earth (even the sun, moon, and stars offer praise), for God's influence is found there as well. Because God's reach is expansive, our praise of God must also be expansive.

MAY 22

NO STRINGS ATTACHED

ACTS 16:9-15; PSALM 67;
REVELATION 21:10,22 - 22:5; JOHN 5:1-9

In the whole of scripture, God has no marionettes. There are no puppets on strings and no mindless androids with encoded instructions or remote controls. God labors alongside God's people. God works with folks, such as Moses, who have troubled pasts and deep insecurities. God welcomes the participation of a young, betrothed woman who hears a prophecy and embraces it. In the work of salvation, justice, and wholeness, God has always enlisted partners.

This partnership is on display in John 5 as Jesus enlists the sick man at the pool of Beth-zatha to participate in his own healing. He is not doing *for* the man; he's doing the work *with* him. We see it again in the story of Lydia's conversion (Acts 16). First, we hear of the Holy Spirit contributing to Paul, Silas, and Timothy in their work and travels. Then the Lord opens Lydia's heart to the words of Paul. All are collaborative

works of love. The community of believers is growing through the faithfulness of God and cooperation of humans. God and people have mutual responsibilities to each other.

In the last 30 years, disability justice movements have organized around the phrase "Nothing about us without us." This is God's posture—power *with* rather than power over. The church is poised to become something deeper than a charitable enterprise. We are empowered to nourish resilient community and shift the world's trajectory toward responsible partnership.

MAY 29

GUIDE AND CRITIC

ACTS 16:16-34; PSALM 97;
REVELATION 22:12-21; JOHN 17:20-26

The end of Eastertide always feels a little like Advent to me. There's a communal longing and anticipation for God to step into the human condition. Instead, we commemorate Jesus' ascension into the heavens—and now we are waiting, again. But this Sunday we rewind a bit in the story to the scene before Jesus' arrest. Jesus prays and casts a vision for his disciples and for us, for a church that is one with God and with each other in ways that transcend our myriad differences.

In truth, this vision still awaits its time. The fractured American church hardly resembles the church of Jesus' dying wish. The Roman Empire scattered Jesus' disciples once he was no longer with them, so the disciples needed something stronger than empire to hold them together. In parts of the religious landscape in the U.S., church and state are indistinguishable. On the first anniversary of the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, NPR correspondent John Burnett unpacked the Patriot Church movement, examining how Christian nationalism thrives in the U.S. with its insistence that the United States is a "Christian nation." I call to mind the Barmen Declaration and Martin Luther King Jr.'s prophetic reminder that the church "must be the guide and the critic of the state—never its tool." ❖

**IN THE WORK OF JUSTICE,
GOD HAS ALWAYS ENLISTED
PARTNERS.**

"Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

H'rumps



WE DON'T SING ABOUT BRUNO

By Joey Chin

Date: Sunday, May 17, 2122
To: allchurch@gracechurch.metaverse
From: staff@gracechurch.metaverse
Subject: Children singing in church

Recently our staff has received many questions about why we do not permit children to sing during services. We understand that this is a contentious issue, and we want to do our best to respond to these concerns. Before we begin, it must be made clear that on all matters of doctrine, we look to the sacred All-Church PDF sent out by our founding elders in the year 2022, almost 100 years ago, which clearly defined our church policy.

To begin, let us look at section 4.A of the holy PDF. It states: "Please do not allow your children to sing during the sermon, especially if it's a shouted rendition of 'We Don't Talk About Bruno.'" Given this language from the foundational All-Church PDF, the prescribed ban on singing seems clear (although we're not quite sure who Bruno was or why people weren't supposed to talk about him). Some of you have noted that this directive may have been a response to disruptions during services. While it is true that we have found several cellphone videos from 2022 of children standing up to loudly sing in the middle of the Eucharist, there is simply no way to know if section 4.A of the PDF was written in response to that.

Some of you have also asked why we do not permit children to sing, since we *do* allow children to come to church without wearing masks, which seems to be in clear contradiction to section 3.B of the holy PDF, which states: "Please ensure that all children over the age of 2 wear their masks at all times during services. We recognize the inconvenience, especially for younger children, but this is an essential step in protecting the health of all members of the congregation, especially the most vulnerable." While it does seem clear that this passage prescribes mask wearing, we

WE'RE NOT QUITE SURE WHO BRUNO WAS OR WHY PEOPLE WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO TALK ABOUT HIM.

must remember that this PDF is rooted in a specific time and context when a deadly virus was ravaging the globe. Things today are obviously different.

Finally, some of you have noted that archeological digs in cyber vaults (which our founders called "the cloud") reveal messages, which quickly became canonical, that praise the performance of several children who sang in services held in the sanctuary during summer 2022 for something called "Vacation Bible School." One congregant at the time, on something that was (perhaps facetiously) called "Facebook," wrote: "We're so proud of our 6-year-old Liam for his excellent singing of 'Let It Go' (and for not singing 'We Don't Talk About Bruno')—he's obviously ready to join the church choir!" From this, it seems that children were indeed allowed to sing in church, and that apparently children as young as 6 were allowed to join the church choir (although we don't know what Liam wanted to "let go" nor, again, why his parents didn't want to talk about Bruno.) But we interpret this to refer to times when only other children and lay volunteers were present, and only for "special" performances of the church choir—never on a Sunday. Given that it is already difficult for clergy to hold the attention of congregants even without the off-key cuteness of warbling children, and given the inspired guidance of the All-Church PDF, we must continue Metaverse's prohibition against children singing in church.

We hope this sheds light on where we stand as a church. If any of your children have questions about this, we refer you to section 5.G, which says: "If children have any questions, they should really just ask their parents on the car ride home."

From the Pastors and Staff,
 The Metaverse Church

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Joey Chin, a former *Sojourners* fellow, is an elementary school teacher in Redmond, Wash.

BUILDING THE FAITHFUL FUTURE



Sojourners staff members celebrate Sojourners' 20th anniversary in 1991.

As we celebrate **Sojourners' 50th anniversary**, we are looking back at our journey through photos and stories from the archives. Search your favorite social media platform for the hashtag **#FaithfulFutureFriday** to explore our past, present, and future. Together, we will continue putting our faith into action for social justice for many years to come.

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